Marxism Today

Third World special issue:
Lynda Chalker, Glenys Kinnock,
Fred Halliday, Melvyn Westlake,
Michael Holman, Stuart Hall

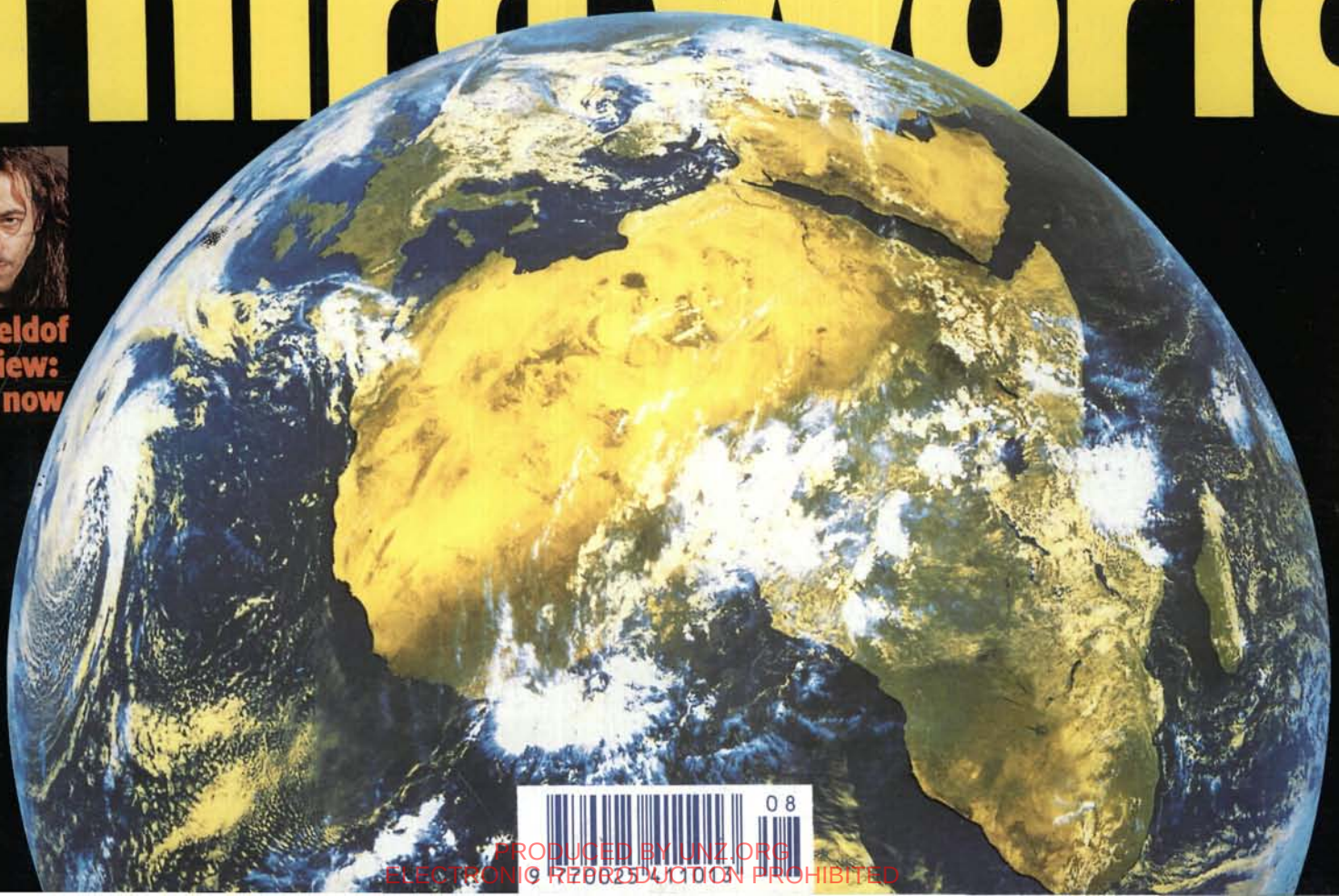
Will disaster in Africa result in a new, benign Western imperialism?

Did Live Aid create a permanent change in popular attitudes to global poverty?

Has communism's collapse transformed the West's relationship with the Third World?

The New Third World

Bob Geldof interview: Africa now



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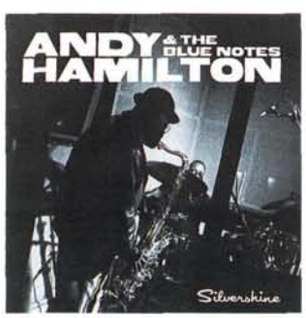

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September issue on sale: Wednesday August 28th

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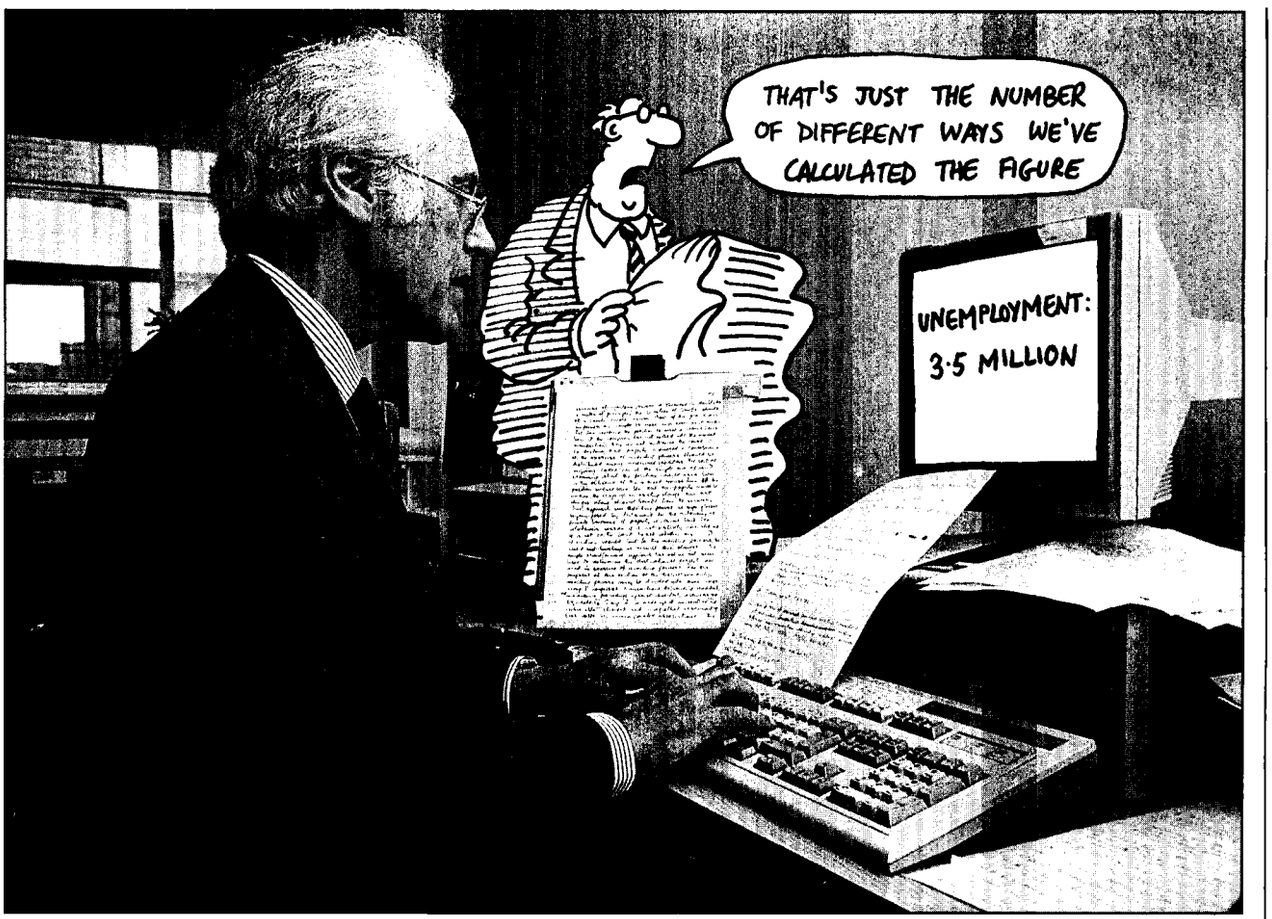
Robert Markless on Britain's adding up problems

Vital Statistics



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Freedom of information is at the centre of the current debate on constitutional reform. Citizen's charters, or more wide-ranging reforms of our electoral system, are of little value unless the public have accurate facts and figures with which to appraise their elected representatives.

At present it is extremely difficult to assess the real numbers of unemployed, the level of homelessness, the length of hospital waiting lists or the number of people below the official poverty line. During the 1980s, government cutbacks and changes in the methods of collection and analysis of official statistics have increased dramatically. In the case of unemployment, for instance, the Department of Employment admit to eight changes in the way in which the figures are compiled.

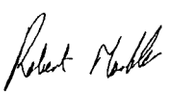
In the early 80s, Lord Rayner (then chairman of Marks & Spencer) undertook a review of the collection and use of official statistics. This resulted in the 'Rayner doctrine'. Collection and publication of data was to be determined purely by the needs of government, without regard to the needs of an informed society. Although it was introduced as a cost-cutting exercise, it has been suggested that this has provided the government with the opportunity to alter statistics, particularly those which could have proved embarrassing. It also coincided with a trend towards withholding information, or announcing statistics at the most opportune time.

Towards the end of the decade, poor economic statistics were blamed by John Major, then chancellor of the exchequer, for errors in underestimating the buoyancy of the economy – errors which resulted in the introduction of policies adding to the recessionary pressures on the economy. As the *Treasury Bulletin* conceded, 'the quality of UK economic statistics has deteriorated over the last few years' (Autumn 1990). This hasn't stopped John Major from trying to confuse the public by citing first the underlying rate of inflation, and then the headline rate when the latter became less embarrassing for him.

Certainly, governments prior to 1979 have manipulated statistics to their advantage. But the altering of statistics and masking of facts became endemic features of the Thatcher governments. If the present government, or any which succeed it, wish to inspire the public's confidence, let alone become crusaders for citizens' rights, then a decisive break must be made. The 'Rayner doctrine' should be dropped, and a commitment made to ensure that meaningful official statistics are readily accessible beyond the corridors of Whitehall. One route to this might be the establishment of an independent watch-dog such as a National Statistics Council.

For such a body to be effective, it would have to be independent of government, reporting directly to parliament, as the National Audit Office does. It would have responsibility to provide a mechanism through which interested parties could contribute to decisions about the content of official statistics and adjudicate if accusations of political abuse were made.

Failure to improve the quality of data collection and analysis constitutes a false economy. For an informed society, official statistics should be in the public domain, easily understood and provided at little or no cost. The nation will be the beneficiary. There are no losers. ●



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A paradigm-shift in international politics

Notion Of A Nation

Illustration: Simon Stern

Geoff Mulgan

Before 1989 east European dissidents used to complain that peace in Europe was an illusion. The appearance of order and detente masked a low intensity war between governments and governed. When the bombs began to fall on Yugoslavia, the West seemed to have forgotten that order loses its appeal when someone else is in control. Solemn foreign ministers announced that stability had to come before immature political posturing. The Slovenians and Croatians should wait their turn for an orderly transition.

The arguments for the status quo were familiar. Before 1989 change was resisted on the grounds that the only choice lay between communist order and nuclear chaos. Now there's a widely held view that the only choice lies between a night of the living dead of ethnic violence and revenge, and a new world order in which the integrity of nations is paramount.

Like the Baltic states, Georgia and Azerbaijan, Croatia and Kurdistan, the people in Ljubljana have set out to challenge this choice. They make the simple claim that Slovenia's integrity as a sovereign community is more important than that of the larger Yugoslav nation. Where others have failed they seem to have succeeded, though these are still early days. By defending themselves they have proved their credentials as a nation in time-honoured fashion, and shown again that nationalism reaches parts that other political ideologies cannot reach. The simple act of resistance has forced the West to reverse its policy.

For the Slovenians, that alone constitutes an historic victory. But for the West there is a deeper significance in what is happening in the Balkans. The remarkable feature of this crisis is not the intransigence of the Yugoslav army, the bitterness of the Croats and Serbs, or even the EC's belated appearance as peacemaker. Rather it is the fact that the most predicted national crisis of modern times caught the West by surprise. Policy was changed on the hoof in an unseemly scramble to keep up with events. All the conventional wisdoms and realpolitik were blown away in a few short days of fighting in the hedgerows.

Again and again since the cold war petered out, the elite of international affairs have misjudged situations and clung to an illusion of order even as it was crumbling in front of their eyes. Three grand mistakes stand out. The first was the failure to recognise that Saddam Hussein would use force, despite his own admission that he wanted to become a regional superpower. Ironically, the West saw him as a force for order in an unstable area. The second mistake was the initial failure to back the Kurds and Shiites after the war, again because of an unwillingness to challenge the integrity of Iraq, Turkey and Syria's borders. Only when public opinion became incensed did decision-makers appreciate that the integrity of Iraq's borders might be a lesser principle than the survival of several hundred thousand Kurds. The third mistake (with the honorable exception of Austria) has been to support a federal government in Belgrade (and some would add Moscow) far beyond the point when it was realistic to believe that the old borders would survive.

When the same mistake is repeated, it is often because there is a cultural barrier standing in the way of accurate analysis. This now seems to be the case in the world of international relations, where the barrier is an inbred conservatism with roots in millenia of restrained politeness, and in a lifestyle which involves too much time sitting around conference tables, arguing about a comma here and a 'federal' there. Its effect is a natural sympathy for other governments' efforts to keep things together in difficult times.

The diplomats' hankering for stability is not without foundation. Disorder always leads to suffering, and it is usually the weak who suffer most. Nationalist disorder is particularly violent, not least for people like the Ossetians or Kosovans who lack even embryonic states. But the problem with the orthodox view is not so much moral as practical: it keeps getting things wrong. Intergovernmental solidarity – the mutual sympathy of those in power – is a bad guide when things are on the move.

And on the move they certainly are. International relations now appear to be going through something of a paradigm-shift. The old paradigm – based on international law, balances of power and sovereign nations – is losing its grip. Instead we face a confusing mix of resurgent identities and an assertive and ethically inspired world public opinion, strong international non-governmental organisations to aid peace, working with ever shorter fuses between anger and violence. With such a bewildering outlook, it is hardly surprising that as with all paradigms, the old way of thinking survives even in the face of contrary evidence.

For President Bush it is all rather disheartening. The bland optimism of his first two years is long gone. It is not much help to draw on Fukuyama and interpret each new war as a last throw of 'historical' societies, belatedly trying to join the post-historical club. Nor is it much help invoking the new world order which though effective as a conservative principle, protecting nations against invasion, has turned out to be hopeless as an active principle for taking the world beyond the legacies of 1945 and 1918.

The ironic outcome of a new world order that was meant to be based on self-determination is that we now face an invidious choice. Either we can have a new world, based on principles like self-determination and democracy (and the atavistic conflicts that come with freedom). Or we can have order, complete with laws and policemen. Unfortunately we can't have both.

That there are difficult choices to be made between order and freedom is not surprising. For all the unravelling that has taken place, first of 1945 and now of 1918 – of Austro-Hungarian Yugoslavia, and Ottoman Iraq – we are only back at the point when Woodrow Wilson tried to make self-determination the paramount principle for a postwar era.

Then, the conservative realists won the arguments (give or take a few new nations in eastern Europe). Most of the empires survived, order was restored and self-determination was neutered. This time round, though, when people can put their case directly to the world, bypassing diplomats and chancelleries, it is suddenly beginning to look as if the scales are tipping the other way.●

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Sarah Benton on the government's international relief programme

Aiding Change

Lynda Chalker is minister of state for overseas development

How has the world in which you are now operating changed in the last few years? I'm thinking of things ranging from major disasters to new problems of need or economic patterns.

During the last three to four years, most of the emerging democracies and many other developing countries have changed their priorities. They have realised that without a sound economic base their growth would just waste away. More than 20 countries now have economic reform programmes under the aegis of the IMF and the World Bank. Countries which have pursued such programmes for a few years have achieved a stability and a positive and growing economic growth rate. So there is a different attitude in the developing world towards their own economic management.

Our policy is seeking to help these countries to help themselves. Priorities are agreed between the government of that country and ourselves. There are, however, a number of countries to whom we give aid, both humanitarian and developmental aid, which goes through non-governmental organisations. That occurs where either we have no relationship with the government or they have abused human rights.

Has there been an increase in poverty or a change in the nature of poverty, in the last five years? Is the world more vulnerable to famine or more afflicted by disasters when they happen?

Certainly the world is more vulnerable to famine and also to environmental degradation. It's only been in the last four or five years that the world has really woken up to the rate at which we're using natural resources. One of the greatest problems for many developing countries is their rate of population growth. Because population growth has been so fast, there is in absolute terms, increased poverty.

There is also a very much greater threat of poverty because the failure of crops in the 80s has been more frequent than in any previous decade.

23 governments have accepted economic reform programmes. Is this because governments have responded to heavy pressure on them from international agencies and individual countries?

There's a mixture. Many of the governments have watched others succeeding and getting growth by adopting economic reforms. But I do believe that donors have a right to say: 'We want the money used wisely'.

There has been a critical discussion around this, and the idea of good government, and making aid conditional upon it. Yet a lot of British aid has gone to countries like Kenya or Malawi, which have poor human rights records. And there is an anxiety that rather than your being keen to benefit the poor in those countries, this is part of a general new world order; that the most powerful countries in the world, dominated by the United States, have been intervening in Third World countries, to make them more stable, in America's view.

Many of these countries are not actually being forced into these paths. Good government consists of many things, not simply following a sensible economic programme. It's being accountable to the people; it's respecting human rights; it's respecting the rule of law. But we do draw the line if we think governments are not only misappropriating resources that could be better spent on another country, but also abusing human rights and the rule of law. With countries like the Sudan or Somalia or Sri Lanka, we're quite prepared to say, no more development aid.

So how do you draw up your criteria of where aid can be given?

You can't have one set of criteria, but we look at things like: is there an accountable system of government? Are they transparent in their financial transactions? Are they seeking to have a programme which will really target money on the poorest people? Are they seeking to give the sort of infrastructure which will allow business to create jobs and opportunities? And in that way, with a whole long list of criteria, some countries will score well on some things and poorly for others. That's why we try to implement aid on a country by country basis with incentives for them to do better where we feel they're doing badly, and to encourage them where they're doing reasonably well.

You have talked about giving money directly to non-governmental organisations where you don't like the government. Is this a trend for the future, that Western countries will say that the price of giving aid is that they sweep aside or sidestep a government? And is not a consequence of this that poor countries will lose their national integrity?

What I want to see is accountable democratic systems in each country; then you have a peaceful way of changing the government if they don't pursue the policies that the people wish them to. Where we have a situation in which people need help, where the government is unwilling for them to receive help, then we have to look at what the local situation is. We try not to act irrespective of governments, but to encourage governments to see what can be done for their people. This is not done just by Britain, but by all donors. We don't like the idea of intervening against the will of the government, but sometimes the will of the government isn't the will of the people, and we need to give help to the people.

But you're not concerned that countries who are dependent on aid for the survival of their people and who are being forced to follow policies decided by Western donors, might have lost their independence?

There is also a view that the donor country has a right to decide how its money should be spent. What if a donor thinks that a country has wasted or has ignored, environmental criteria, for example, which are critically important to a lot of project work. What if you actually think that a country is repeatedly ignoring the environmental standards that we're trying to achieve. Then I think the donor country does have a right to say, 'All right, we're not going to go on putting money in there'.

It is, after all, the donor country's money in the first place. A country which in one year may have been performing badly will suddenly do something right. You have to find ways of responding, that's what I call the carrot approach. Where they abuse human rights, you have to come down very sharply and say 'no'.

There has also been criticism that in the new talk of economic reform there is no clear set of performance indicators. But there has been pressure against the old form of socialist or state-dominated governments, and a relative lack of action in cases of inequality in the private sector. I'm thinking about Brazil or Asia.

Brazil has a tremendous contrast between those who have had economic success there and those who have not. It has got to look at its public spending in order to get more of its resources, spent on people who are extremely poor. I've had this very discussion with the government of Brazil.

The countries that run heavy socialist para-states have been inefficient for years. When we have been invited to help them we nearly always come back saying, with the agreement of the government concerned: we want to reform that para-state, or we want to cut back it's size. You will only get a successful

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Photography: Abel Lagos

outcome if they are given the know-how with which to achieve that more modern organisation. I was interested to hear Kenya saying that they will be doing away with the para-state there. Now two years ago, you wouldn't have got that response from them.

Would you also intervene where you felt that things within, say, the private sector, were also inefficient, including land reform or a caste system or anything like this?
One has to be a little more careful in intervening in what I might call tribal matters. One has to be pretty sensitive, but we don't hesitate to do so if we believe that it's hindering the development. I've probably made myself fairly unpopular with certain men around the world is where I see women being deprived of education, access to health advice.

You have been sharply criticised by the right wing of your own party about whether one should give aid at all. Is some of what you say more of a response to them?
No. I am doing what I believe genuinely to be right. I'm not a very dogmatic person in the sense of following a line because it suits the party managers. I want to help countries, governments and people to help themselves.

And is having a nice person like you here a sop, when the real fate of developing countries depends on commodity prices, bank interest rates and terms of trade, which are dealt with by other departments
Hang on a minute. Debt relief – I've been the minister pressing other nations to come in line with the Trinidad Terms. On a lot of other issues which you may think are hard issues of the Treasury, they're actually pursued through this department, with the IMF, the World Bank, and so on. I may seem awfully nice when you're smiling at me and I'm smiling back at you, but I can be as tough as old boots when I have to be! Getting the economics right is a very large part of helping countries to get off on the right foot. I'm certainly going to argue for sensible economic reform, but also for the relief of poverty.

If you look carefully at opinion polls women are always more in favour of giving aid than men. Why do you think that is?
Because women see aid as being more positively helpful. And women are more likely to read articles about the uses of aid than men. You get the industrial scandals in the business pages. You get the positive assistance to a health project or an education project in women's magazines, and in things like the women's page of *The Guardian*.●

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Public knowledge and private pay

Funny Money

Illustration: Simon Stern

Sarah Benton

In the hot, or, as the case may be, sodden months of early summer companies publish their accounts. It's an odd season when any of the information they contain migrates from the financial section to the front page. This year was an odd season. The potent combination of privatisation and high executive pay whipped company reports out of the dull obscurity they share with stock prices and the cricket score into 'sexy', as journalists say, news.

The failure to make company information 'sexy' is journalistic as well as political. Today, money is not power, as many a wealthy widow knows; information is. Or rather, knowledge is strategic power, and that is confined to fewer and fewer people. The 'British obsession' with secrecy operates as powerfully in the private sector as in the state. Indeed, bring together private finance and the public realm and the obsession riddles our public life with black holes.

This may be a bit tough on the Brits. The old world order designed half a dozen little pockets of secrecy in Europe precisely so that financial secrets could be made impregnable to public law. What else explains the existence of miniature 'independent' states like Luxembourg (pop 350,000) Liechtenstein (pop 28,000) Monaco, Andorra and even Switzerland. These statelets survive by the grace and favour of the big powers which could have gobbled them up years ago in some postwar settlement or other. Their independent national identity is a fiction. Like the autonomy enjoyed by Jersey, the Isle of Man or the Turks and Caicos islands, the independence of Luxembourg exists as a convenience for the powerful – and not just to provide neutral ground for international conferences or the Thatchers' summer holiday.

They survive in order to keep the secrets of the rich and royal. As Botswana for years was the safe deposit for the sexual secrets of white men from South Africa, so men of the capitalist world use the citadels of Liechtenstein or Zurich to store – or in the case of Monaco, squander – their money in secret. The notional independence provides the best fortress in the world for, until the Gulf war, the national integrity of a foreign state has been legally impregnable. No laws passed in Britain, no pressure from employees or wives can breach the walls of these citadels. They are strong boxes from which no glimmer of usable information seeps out. To betray financial information in a Swiss bank is a form of treason.

British journalists should take their share of blame for keeping us uninformed. It was a one-time journalist on the *Financial Times* who pointed out that his paper, pre-eminently well informed about finance, never broke stories about financial scandals. It is certainly true that rumours about the Bank of Credit and Commerce International have been circulating in men's clubs for years – and even surfaced in a paper or two 10 years ago, before Britain's libel laws drove them back into the clubs. If people knew, why did they not publicise their knowledge?

The more morally restricted medium of television is bolder about sex than it is about money. Naked bottoms in a Denis Potter play are headline news; the City Program is minority viewing. TV interviewers religiously observe the code which says that a man's income is his private life and beyond question. There's many a chap would rather talk about his sex life on television than reveal his income to his wife, or even worse, ex-wife. Marriage surveys usually discover that women have no idea what their partners earn. So much for the family wage. More people remember the measurement of Sir Ralph Halpern's sex life (five times a night) than of his enormous golden handshake.

No matter; these scraps of gossip are inventions anyway. Estimates of the income of our monarch are equally stabs in the dark. The value of the deal her family made with the British state lay not so much in the extra wealth it gave them but in the secrecy that they were permitted to maintain. Following Michael Fagan's intrusion into her bedroom, we know more about the Queen's sex life (she does not sleep with the Duke) than we do about her money. Had Simon Hughes' bill to make the monarchy subject to tax been passed, the loss of the Royal Family would have been in its control of financial knowledge rather than of income, but it seems we prefer not to know.

The Britishness of this reticence about the rich is balanced by the Britishness of vulgarity about sex. John Banham, director general of the CBI, deployed this British defense about the pay awards in the privatised utilities. He suggested that if we did not object to Madonna (brainless breasty bimbo) earning millions, why should we mind the directors of once public utilities pocketing their nice little earners? No one other than Mr Banham imagines that the whopping profits of the newly privatised industries depend on the unique skills of the men (can you name two of them?) running the companies. His analogy, or is it pique? is absurd. Madonna may bring on Mr Banham's stiff upper lip; he may be deeply offended that she can command more money than his sober-suited pals. But in his free-market hat he recognises that millions choose to pay for Madonna's performance art, believing it to be unique. We *have* to use water and electricity, and we have to pay what we are charged.

The government would certainly like all this talk of money – including the lack of it among the seriously poor removed from the public domain. The discovery of other people's earnings is unsettling. Hence Michael Howard's tilting at Labour's proposal for a minimum wage. It is the knowledge about what people earn, in this case how disturbingly little, which he wishes to suppress as much as the economic effects of increasing pay.

Yet there is another side to public knowledge about pay. Company executives are, like even the best paid journalists, employees. They can be sacked. They do not have to be told what is going on. In modern divisions of labour, control over work has been exchanged for conspicuously high earnings. And that's the other side. A well-paid worker wishes to keep his earnings private in order to forestall envy and the payment of too much income tax. But he also wishes to obscure his loss of power – or knowledge – with a shield of conspicuous wealth. So who does know what's what? Who knows?●

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Market Trading

Robert Skidelsky is professor of political economy at Warwick University

Charlie Leadbeater (*MT* July) asks questions about the social market to which he assumes nobody has been trying to find answers. Thus, he assigns the Social Democrats, who promoted the idea in the 1980s, to the category of non-persons, while his own attempts to attach a content to the label hark back to the failed neo-corporatism of the 60s and 70s, and a confused notion of 'citizenship'.

The presumptions of the social market concept are: that the market system should be the main instrument for providing society with its services; that the onus should be on those who want to substitute public for market choice to make the case that the market failure is substantial and endemic; and that public choice will make things better. In addition, a market economy, if it is to be legitimate, has to be embedded in legal and social arrangements regarded as 'fair'.

Those who accept this approach believe that market relations must be widened and deepened from the point at which the Thatcher revolution left them. They hold that the state has a powerful social role to play in two areas: in enabling some sections of society to participate more effectively in market relations, and in guaranteeing a right to certain kinds of resources, independent of market performance.

These principles impose certain disciplines on thought which Leadbeater is far from grasping. Because of this, he does not begin to argue a logical case for market failure in this area, nor suggest any reasons for believing that government intervention will make things better – two key tests for anyone who claims to believe in market principles. Instead he offers the empirical assertion that free-market economies like Britain 'failed', seen relative to more organised economies like Germany and Japan in the 1980s. What is the evidence for this? If we take the period 1979-89, Britain came seventh out of 24 OECD countries in growth of GDP per head – ahead of Germany and France, though behind Japan. In growth of capital per head, it came second to Finland. Where is the market failure here?

Leadbeater puts forward the well-known argument that companies should regard themselves as responsible to the wider community, not just to their shareholders. He ignores the criticism that analysis of companies in terms of multiple 'stakeholders' fudges the central issue of accountability. What is lurking here, I suspect, is a notion of managerial (and no doubt trade union) benevolence, which public choice theory has knocked on the head.

The concept of citizenship has come onto the agenda for many reasons, some of which are valid. But we need to be suspicious of those arguments for citizens' 'rights' which are seen as alternatives to market choice, and which are designed to entrench public provision where it is no longer required – for instance, as an alternative to contracting out local authority services. Leadbeater shows no awareness of the two main problems of enforcing legally granted 'social rights': that they depend on resources which are in scarce supply, and that the costs of obtaining redress take considerable information, time and energy.

Yet the social market economy approach has had much to say on the question of how best to organise delivery of public services. One basic conclusion is that provision and funding should be separated. Another is that cash payments from the state to users, empowering them to buy the service from the supplier of their choice, provide a more effective redistributive (and opportunity-equalising) mechanism than state services provided free at point of entry. Education is a challenging field for the application of these principles; but they remain, so far, beyond Leadbeater's horizon.●

The Right Hon David Hunt MP is secretary of state for Wales

Charlie Leadbeater's article on the social market (*MT* July) provided a valuable summary of the problems associated with defining the social market economy, even in these days when so many politicians claim to espouse it. There is much good sense in his article. The 'social market' can never be anyone's 'big idea' until there is some degree of consensus about its precise meaning. After all, the collapse of socialism in central Europe proves that markets have finally prevailed over collectivism, and any market is, by its very nature, social, since it necessarily involves social interaction – so what *isn't* a social market?

The value of the 'social market' epithet is the distinction between an idealised laissez-faire economy and the sort of market economy which, in practice, both creates wealth efficiently and embodies a widely-held view of social justice. Firstly, the state has a duty always to presume in favour of the market and competition. The onus of proof should always fall to those who argue for public provision, not for the private sector, and the government should play a very active role in ensuring that markets operate genuinely in the interests of consumers.

Secondly, a social market, in embodying a plausible principle of social justice, ought to be based on a formula akin to the 'difference principle' of John Rawls – that any inequality can only be justified insofar as it increases the welfare of the least well-off. A free market creates wealth for the whole of society.

Thirdly, I endorse Major's vision of a society which enshrines the right to own, and the right to opportunity – as he put it, a society 'in which opportunity is not confined to the fortunate few', or, in Leadbeater's words, 'a more open, less class-ridden, talent-based, meritocratic society'. A century ago, perhaps, the marxist dialectic – the idea of workers deprived of the fruits of their labours – still had a tenuous relationship with reality. But the spread of ownership – home ownership, share ownership and, above all, *employee* share ownership – is putting an end to the divide between 'them and us'.

I believe that a British social market, based upon that revolution in ownership, would be hugely popular and widely accepted. I agree with Charlie Leadbeater's proclamation that 'to win legitimacy a market economy must sustain a sense of community' – what might be termed a sense of belonging. With a social market, the state should play an *enabling* role, through the education system in particular, to give to everyone the opportunity and the incentive to contribute to the nation's success, and a vested interest in that success. A British social market would evolve from the traditions of centuries, and it has already begun to do so.●

Super Markets

Unfortunately, I feel no power when I pay British Telecom bills; do my weekly shopping in either Tesco's or Sainsbury's; go to Dolland and Aitchison, rather than Boots, for an eye test; pick J Smith, plumber, over T Jones, plumber, from the Yellow Pages; or choose the Prudential, rather than Eagle Star, for a pension.

Until I do, I will find the continuing discussion surrounding the public sector dismaying (*MT* May/June), especially the Manifesto For The Public Sector, which contained overreaching assumptions about the existence of power in the market, disheartening failure to discuss the inequalities that flourish under such a market, and the inept investment of the words 'choice' and 'consumer' with the ability to liberate.

In a decade's time, with the new-style public sector salad bar in place, those people who remain uncatered for cannot be blamed for not using public power – it was a false present in the first place. Public power should not and cannot come from being a consumer, but must come from an unchangeable right to the public and common provision of those things which the market fails to provide but from which nobody should be excluded.●

Sarah Plumeridge, Sheffield

The History Men

Once upon a time there was a party, called the Communist Party, and it had a historians' group. This was very successful in popularising a leftish version of British history; so successful, in fact, that some of its products became school texts, and one by EP Thompson, *The Making Of The English Working Class*, was cited as a 'huge' influence by an English historian, Simon Schama (*MT* July).

Quite what kind of influence, however, remains obscure. Schama quite clearly is a liberal historian. He can tell good stories and he believes that history has an intrinsic value. He has, however, no real project, except perhaps the construction of an unfocused populist history.

Who is to provide the focus? Clearly not Schama. Perhaps *MT* could interview Christopher Hill or Eric Hobsbawm, so that we can all live happily ever after... ●.

Keith Flett, London

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Blended Scotch

James M Carmichael's anti-devolutionary remarks on Scottish identity and regional government (*MT* letters, July), offering a vivid example of what Tom Nairn calls the 'Scottish cringe', require refutation. Contrary to Carmichael's comments, the urban/rural divide in a society does not provide the grounds to argue that since Scotland is a diverse country, it doesn't have a national identity. The composition of any such identity tends to be multi-dimensional, not something that should be treated simplistically in order to promote a political prejudice.

And the attempt to argue that reformers such as David Marquand (*MT* May) are seeking to establish 'mini-Westminsters' is a wilful misrepresentation. Replication of current Westminster styles and behaviours is not a goal of regionalisation, quite the reverse. When faced with regionalisation as a means of reforming the British state, Carmichael must offer more than unionist fundamentalism as a response.

After all, when he talks about 'adapting to European systems of government' and mentions Germany, he might care to ponder upon the political system of that country and also of a number of other EC countries. For consideration of the political structure of EC states reads like a roll-call of mini-Westminsters, with federal Germany, quasi-federal Belgium, a post-Franco Spain of autonomous communities and France and Italy exhibiting regional government structures. Adapting to these systems would seem to reflect Marquand's concerns for territorial autonomy rather well.●

Peter Lynch, London

Helter Celter

James M Carmichael's blustering apologia for the English hegemony on these islands (*MT* letters, July) subsides pathetically into 'hoping like hell that Germany will take over our economy'. The Germans might well call for a clarification, and indeed rectification, of current English thinking concerning political power: no slackening of any central control in Britain, and no moving towards it in Europe. This inconsistency, so stubbornly adhered to in Britain, is increasingly perceived as derisory elsewhere.

Carmichael's outburst reflects Celtic servility at its most pitiful; happy to be governed by the English, however ineptly, even yearning to be governed by the Germans, but too lacking in self-respect to undertake the responsibilities of self-government.●

Iowerth Jones, Llanelli

Held On Trust

The muddle in Chris Ham's article on NHS reform (*MT* July) is indicative of what happens when you mess with capitalism. The Thatcherite attack on the medical profession is of a piece with her followers' hatred of all privileged spongers – civil servants, teachers, social workers – whether employed or merely protected by the state. Such parasites must play the same nasty game every small businessman has to play: incentive equals profit and/or fear of failure and poverty. What other motives do people have for working hard and helping each other?

Ham's suggestion that 'the threat of competition' in medical provision 'would be more important than the reality' is absurd. Competition means winners and losers, and the losers will be the poor and inarticulate – the unprofitable. His support for competition between hospitals, while he opposes GP fund holding, is deeply illogical. Just like GPs, trust hospitals will be corrupted by unequal purchasing power, the need to balance budgets and the cash nexus which destroys trust between doctor and patient.

Patients (like pupils in schools) are not 'customers' or 'consumers'. Nor are doctors and nurses monopoly 'providers' who need a bracing dose of financial discipline and competition to make them work harder.●

Peter Holmes, Windsor

TV Or Not TV

If tv distances us from the suffering of others, as Kevin Robins suggests (*MT* July) it can also distance us from the bullshit of governments. Tv allowed many Americans to see their sons killing and dying in Vietnam rather than 'protecting and liberating'. Mobile tv crews were the worst thing ever to happen to distant colonial wars. Which is why the state prefers studio interviews and pooled correspondents to video in the field.●

Mike Belbin, London

Retail Therapy

After Julian Peach's letter (*MT* July) about a question on the back page of the magazine, I flicked through my back copies, re-read the questionnaires, and noticed that the interviewees, nearly one and all, seemed to be inexplicably phased by the question about how much money they've spent on clothes.

Jeremy Paxman, just £250 on a suit? Marjorie Thomson, £85 on an Arabella Pollen dress a few years ago? Mike Leigh, £100 on an overcoat? (though on second thoughts, judging by the accompanying picture I can believe this, as he's wearing a beanie hat which clearly cost all of 50p from Help The Aged).

Sandie Shaw and Frances Barber go for the 'Don't ask' response, probably a wise bet, though I bet the price of the corset the latter's wearing in her picture was in inverse proportion to the amount of material it contains. The only answer I trust is Caron Wheeler's £500 on a silk shirt. I mean, if you're a reasonably famous and affluent person and you haven't had *one* terrifyingly massive impulse buy in your life, what kind of control freak zombie does that make you?●

Rebecca Howe, Bradford

Marxism Tomorrow

I understand that you have been searching for a new name for your journal. After reading the articles by John Lloyd and Charlie Leadbeater (*MT* July), may I propose that you change the name to *Marketism Today*? One incidental advantage this would entail for you, of course, would be the opportunity to stick to the current abbreviation, *MT*.●

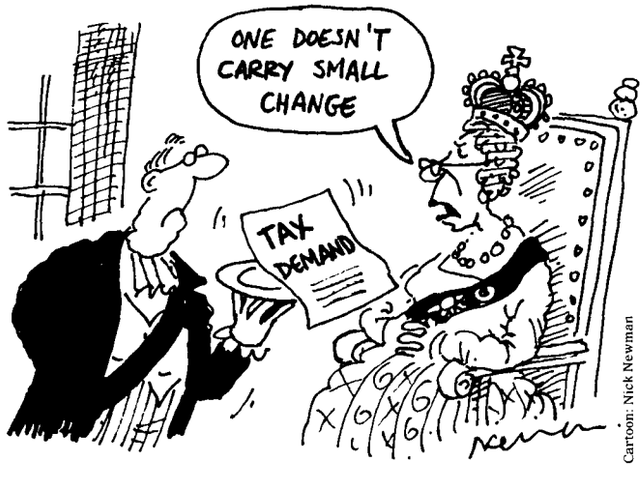
Dr R J Alexander, Germany

Opera Now?

Martin Kettle's article on the opera revolution (*MT* July) could have mentioned education departments, as well as videos. The 1980s saw all major opera companies creating their own educational wing (the Royal Opera House being the last) to 'take opera' into schools and show children how accessible and fun it could be.

However much they may try to deny it, by instigating an interest and then patiently waiting (praying) for the kiddies to find financially remunerative jobs, they are attempting to secure an opera-going belt of the population for the future. But by doing this, by feeling obliged to admit that opera will be inaccessible unless they do this, they have actually written the first few lines of the art form's epitaph, of which videos (whoever they appeal to) are currently constructing the next.●

Andrew Bone, Exeter



Cartoon: Nick Newman

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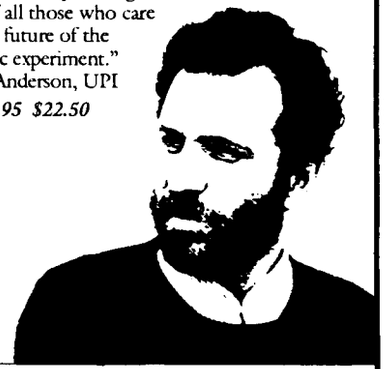

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Suzanne Moore

Wanderlust – who needs it?

Travel Sickness

OK, so I've never spent a year in Provence. But then, nor do I want to. Can you imagine anything more nauseating than being surrounded by retired advertising executives and superannuated British novelists who make their living by patronising peasants? Nor is my idea of a holiday tracking lemurs in Madagascar with the organisation Earthwatch, in order to bolster some vague sense of do-gooding. Give me Japanese tourists any day. Now they are a people who know how to travel. I admire their honesty. I mean, really, what is the point of going anywhere unless you can document every single part of it?

Actually, my idea of a holiday is very simple. It involves doing very little indeed. It has nothing to do with saving the earth or improving myself culturally. When it comes to holidays, I'm afraid my lager lout sensibility comes to the fore. I want somewhere hot, cheap and easy. It hasn't always been this way, believe me.

Like all those retarded Miss World contestants, my ambition was 'to travel'. So I did. First the obligatory blitz around Europe, then the long haul – preferably through some Third World country. For me it was South America and India. These days it's more likely to be Thailand and somewhere in Eastern Europe, but we're talking quantity rather than quality here. That's what matters. How many places you've been to for how long and how cheaply. You will always meet someone who 'did Bolivia on a dollar a week'. But the fact that they actually did *nothing* and pissed off every local in the area by haggling over the price of a loaf of bread doesn't enter into it.

Apart from the Boy's Own attitude that is at the heart of the On The Road mentality, one of the most irritating things about it is the in-built denial of cultural difference. It is only 'travellers' who act as if people are the same the world over and that the world really does belong to them. Running out of money on a three-month trip is not the same kind of poverty as the existence of all those who live on the edges of what is difficult to call a life. You may be there for the 'experience'; they are there because they have nowhere else to go. And it is a culture shock. (Though not perhaps as great as realising that wherever you go in the world you will always find German hippies.)

Faced with such desperation, many travellers take refuge in some naff philosophy about the tapestry of life or go for super-rational detachment. I will always remember the earnest Australian in Madras explaining to me how he distributed money to beggars on the basis of how many limbs they had missing. Then there is the equally bewildering justification of meanness, 'You musn't give them money – it only encourages them'. Oh pardon me, I didn't realise that if I had not given money to that deaf, dumb and blind girl she would actually have got off her arse and become a nuclear physicist.

These dilemmas however should not get in the way of your enjoyment – they are an essential part of the deal. As is moaning about the desire of so many Third World peoples to become 'Westernised', instead of frozen in some exotically impoverished lifestyle. Anyway, the world, as they say, is getting smaller. You no longer need to do Asia on a shoe-string to see homelessness, begging, teenage prostitution – you can get it at home. For a rough guide, look at a map of Britain.

But then, central to 'travelling', unlike tourism, is always some obscure moral imperative. At the heart of travel is the search for the real thing – the unmediated, authentic experience; a pure feeling in a wicked world. Tourism, on the other hand, is castigated for its falseness, its inauthenticity. Such distinctions have been made ever since working-class people could afford to go abroad. They are the stock of that boom industry – travel-writing – which always promises 'a walk on the wild side', yet in reality all blurs into one endlessly descriptive colour supplement for places that you can't even remember the names of.

Even worse, destinations that were once only in the reach of the elite and the intrepid are now within reach of us all. Travel writers have in part been responsible for destroying the things they loved. And they are alarmed. I thought Venice was in trouble because it was falling into the sea, but now I read it is actually the fault of all those 'tourists' who will insist on going there. The final solution being bandied about is, of course, to make such places prole-free zones by upping the prices dramatically.

But never mind culture; what about nature? Or, as I overheard a sloaney woman say the other day, 'The thing about the Galapagos, Nick, is you should only go there if you are totally, totally into animals. Otherwise stay in Quito, it's much better for shopping'. You may be into the 'charismatic megafauna' – big game to you and I – but can you live with yourself if you disrupt the eco-system in order to see them? These apparently are the worries of the new ecotourist, as expressed in American *Elle*: 'My husband wants to save wolves in Poland, but I'd rather count katydids in the Amazon – which is better? What should we do?'

Never mind the holiday, feel the work ethic. Surely the most ecologically sound thing to do would be never to go anywhere at all and give the money to someone who really needs it. For holidays are now as much about time as about space. Hence the success of Centreparcs – those strange plastic bubbles with 'controlled environments' which look like something out of Brave New World. You don't physically need to go far if you can recreate the perfect leisure space nearer home. You just need to have these bursts of concentrated time, doing exactly what you want, to call it a holiday. Getting away from it all may mean staying exactly where you are. Forget the sangria, pass the soma... ●

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The Third World

(1950 - 1990) RIP

Liba Taylor: Select

The Third World is no longer a meaningful concept. **Melvyn Westlake** explains why

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The Third World is dead – at least, as a political and economic concept. It was an identity born of the cold war and a shared sense among developing countries of their disadvantage in the global economy. The events of the 1980s and 1990s have brought its demise: in particular, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the marked divergence of economic performance among developing countries. The record of failure across much of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa has discredited statist development models and created a two-track development that is dissolving the ties of common interest.

The Third World, a term credited to the French writer Alfred Sauvy in the early 1950s, had both a political and economic dimension. At the political level, it was a movement forged by leaders such as Yugoslavian president Tito, Egyptian president Nasser and Indian prime minister Nehru, who sought to find a middle path between Soviet communism and Western capitalism. Their historic 1955 Bandung meeting laid the foundations of the non-aligned movement.

This movement did not prevent the superpowers from recruiting allies among the developing countries and using them as proxies in their titanic 40-year struggle for supremacy. Conversely, some developing-country leaders became adept at exploiting superpower rivalry to sustain their own power or win backing in regional squabbles. Somalia, for example, changed sides twice, being allied first with the US, then with the Soviet Union, and later with the US again (while neighbouring Ethiopia switched the other way).

The disintegration of the Soviet bloc – the second world – has destroyed the old three-world matrix, at the political level. The ascendancy of US-led liberal capitalism has made 'non-alignment' meaningless. The threat of being forced to choose between hostile camps no longer exists. Today everybody is in the same camp.

Of course, this carries its own dangers. The new world order envisaged by US President George Bush will leave developing countries more vulnerable to the dictates of a Washington that is unconstrained by any countervailing force. Any developing country foolhardy enough to incure US wrath can, for the time being at least, expect little material support from any other quarter. That was demonstrated by the Gulf war.

Can the recognition of this vulnerability have the effect of bringing developing countries together into some new grouping for their mutual protection? It does not seem likely. In the first place, the threat will not be perceived as very great by most of them. The costs of military adventures are an obvious deterrent to the US except in a few localised cases like Grenada or Panama. At the same time, the reduced role of ideology as a motivating force in US foreign policy, makes any future conflicts with developing countries highly unpredictable. Moreover, the end of the cold war is combining with other, economic changes to dissolve whatever glue fastened together the countries of the Third World – always a fragile coalition of interests.

At the economic level, the Third World represented a negotiating bloc, the aim of which was to bring about a fairer distribution of global income through agreed structural changes to the world economy. This objective was pursued through United Nations agencies and a variety of other multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as through special conferences. What united the developing countries in this objective was the common legacy of colonialism, with all the inherited economic distortions (amongst Third World countries, only Ethiopia and Thailand were not colonised or partially occupied by Europeans), and the existence of international financial and trade (protectionist) devices that had the effect of redistributing income.

Central to the Third World's demands were mechanisms to halt the secular decline in real commodity prices: the elimination of trade restrictions in the industrialised world which were biased in favour of raw material imports and against goods processed in developing countries; the regulation of multinational companies to end abuses and restrictive business practices; and a greater transfer of capital to developing countries, including aid, to reduce poverty and provide the investment crucial for development.

Even in the early stages, there was no clear definition of a developing country or the constituents of the Third World. Broadly, it was a self-selecting process and depended on which clubs a country chose to join. As well as the non-aligned movement, developing countries formed the Group of 77 (later increased to over 120) within the UN, and the Group of 24 within the IMF and World Bank (eight from each of Asia, Africa and Latin America). On the other side, 24 industrialised countries combined within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with the most powerful also setting up the more exclusive Group of Ten and Group of Seven. It was not entirely dictated by income levels. A definition of under-development which stressed dependence on one or two export commodities even allowed high income oil producers such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to be included in the term Third World.

These oil producers also belonged to another crucial club, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec). Indeed, the range of incomes amongst developing countries was so wide that the very poorest were often viewed as constituting a 'Fourth World'. Yet, broadly speaking, it could be said that the Third World constituted former colonies, and the First World contained the former colonisers. The Soviet bloc countries were largely irrelevant to the economic negotiations. To the extent that they were considered at all, they were lumped together with the industrialised capitalist nations to form the 'North', in what came to be known as the 'North-South dialogue'. The high-watermark for the countries of the South in their crusade to restructure the global economic system came in 1974 with the passing of a declaration calling for the establishment of a 'New International Economic Order'. The quintupling of the oil price by the Opec cartel in 1973–74 had given rise to an optimistic view of producer power. The belief that other commodity producers could emulate Opec appeared to give the South a bargaining lever. It did not work out that way. While reformists in both the North and South continued to press for a new economic order, the later 1970s brought few gains. By the 1980s, it was a lost cause.

One reason was the economic crisis that cut a swathe through the Third World. Problems that had been building up for some years erupted in 1982 when over 30 countries were unable to meet payments on their debts. True, this was partly caused by soaring world interest rates and collapsing commodity prices. But it also focused attention on domestic policy failures and mismanagement. Public finances were frequently in a mess, state companies were piling up losses and income distribution was becoming still more skewed. Whatever the early benefits, the import-substitution model of industrialisation, widely adopted amongst developing countries, was no longer delivering adequate growth.

The failure of Soviet planning and the evident success of a growing number of countries adopting more export-oriented models, further discredited state-driven industrialisation. The successful, export-led economies of East Asia may not have been the paragons of free-market virtue that was claimed, but they exhibited an enviable flexibility that enabled them to withstand shocks. In addition, the sharp shift back to neo-classical economic ideas in Britain, the US and elsewhere in the North, meant that assistance to developing countries would be dependent on their willingness to undertake economic reforms. These included changes in fiscal and exchange rate management, the liberalisation of trade, the privatisation of state industries and the decontrol of prices, interest and credit. For the majority of developing countries there was little alternative to the neo-classical agenda.

Such reforms are now in progress throughout much of the developing world, adopted with enthusiasm by some countries, such as Chile and Mexico, more reluctantly by others. Yet, despite the retreat of the state and the

'The end of the cold war is combining with other economic changes to dissolve whatever glue fastened together the countries of the Third World'

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adoption of market economics, the role of government in developing countries is not about to wither away. A synthesis is occurring: a new partnership is being conceived between government and the private sector. It envisages the free market being left to do what it does best, notably producing goods, while governments concentrate on areas where private enterprise has traditionally proved inadequate – building up the infrastructure and investing in human capital through education and health programmes. Significantly, the World Bank, a weather-vane of development politics, observes in a recent report that intervention versus laissez-faire is a 'popular dichotomy, but a false one'.

However, the reform movement creates a paradox: the objective is to integrate national economies more closely into the global system. But in doing so, the focus has shifted from the structural defects of the international economic system, to domestic policy failures. And the consequence is that developing countries have abandoned any common negotiating agenda as they put 'their own houses in order'. Third World solidarity has become a thing of the past.

At the same time, there is another, still more powerful force that has been pulling apart the Third World. During the 1980s, developing countries have experienced marked divergencies in economic performance. This has given rise to a two-track development which, if continued, will open up an increasing gap between the more successful group of countries and those performing poorly. While those countries achieving quite rapid rates of growth are fewer in number, they account for a far bigger share of the world's population because they include China and India.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the output growth rates of developing countries tended to cluster around the average, of 5% or 6%. This has changed. The average growth of high performers in the 1980s was more than five times faster than the average of poor performers. In a study of 89 developing countries, by World Bank economists Shahrokh Fardoust and Ashok Dhareshwar, 14 were identified as high performers. That is, they had real output growth per head of 2% or more, and an above-average level of investment in relation to their economies.

The good news for world poverty is that these countries account for around 60% of the population of low and middle income countries. In addition to India and China, other big-population countries such as Indonesia (180 million) and Egypt (54 million), also scrape into this group, along with the Asian 'tigers', South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand.

Of the much larger group of 45 low performers, (with about a quarter of the population of all low and middle income countries) over half are to be found in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a significant number also from Central and South America and the Caribbean. These countries have experienced output growth of less than 2% head and below average investment ratios. A third group, of 30 countries, performed poorly on one of the two criteria.

The result of these divergent economic performances is that the income of the typical Chinese or Indian has now overtaken that of the typical citizen of sub-Saharan Africa. This is a remarkable change from the 1960s when Asia seemed doomed for ever to irreducible poverty while Afica was beginning its decolonised era with per capita incomes twice those of Asia. If income growth in the high performers, particularly India and China, remains significantly higher than population expansion for another 20 years, the number of poor people in the world will be cut substantially. Moreover, income distribution in the high performers is often less skewed than in most other developing countries, especially Africa and Latin America. In sub-Saharan Africa, meanwhile, income per head in the year 2000 is likely to be less than in the mid-1960s, even assuming a big improvement during the next few years.

The reasons for the divergent performance remain a matter of contention. The harsh international economic conditions of the early 1980s hit many countries amongst the more successful group, as well as those doing less well. Macro-economic factors, the level of debt, the quality of government, even cultural characteristics are cited to explain divergence of performance: why, for example, India should have done so much better than Nigeria, or Mauritius than Guatemala. But none of these factors adequately explain why Egypt, which has consistently fallen down on its reform promises, has done better than Chile and Ghana which were amongst the earliest reformers (could US aid be a factor?). While the diversity of even the more successful group (big and small population countries; with greater and lesser dependence on commodities; and more and less regulated markets) suggests that there is more than one way to achieve investment-led long-term growth. What is clear is that the successful countries have been able to establish a virtuous circle. And success in the future will require countries to respond flexibly to rapidly changing circumstances and to take advantage of technological developments.

In all probability, the divergencies between developing countries will continue to widen. It was always true that the Third World contained wide disparities of national income. But at some point, the extent of these disparities makes a nonsense of considering these countries as belonging to an identifiable common group. On present trends, the group must sub-divide and sub-divide again. Again, commodities are diminishing in importance to the world economy, removing a central plank of common concern. The more successful developing countries are trying to diversify into non-traditional exports. And, in a world of scarce savings and investment capital, developing countries are jockeying to attract foreign direct investment. Today, the complaint is that foreign direct investment takes place overwhelmingly between a handful of industrialised countries. Fear of the multinational company has been replaced by a fear that many developing countries will fail to win their share of global investment, no matter what they offer to induce foreign companies to come.

'Fear of the multinational company has been replaced by a fear that many developing countries will fail to win their share of global investment'

This is related to another far-reaching change in the world economy which could present many developing countries with the most serious threat they face at the threshold of a new century. This is the increasing regional integration or, put more starkly, the emergence of economic blocs. Over the next few years, the world is going to witness the rise of an economic and financial triumvirate, with western Europe, North America and East Asia becoming regional powerhouses of roughly comparable size (each with between $6.5 to $8 trillion GNP, at today's prices, by the year 2000). Although the countries of East Asia do not yet have the institutional arrangements of the European Community or a North American Free Trade Agreement comprising the US, Canada and Mexico, they are increasingly being drawn together through a network of investment, trade, aid and credit links.

The emergence of three blocs based on the dollar, yen and deutschmark (or maybe the Ecu) need not necessarily conflict with the post-1945 multilateral trading system centered on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Gatt). The rules permit the setting up of free trade areas and customs unions as long as they do not harm others. But at a time when trade protectionism is already increasing alarmingly, the danger is that the blocs now emerging will become inward-looking and fortress-like, rather than centres of trade creation radiating business opportunities to the outside world.

For developing countries, this trend presents huge new dangers. Some may become part of blocs (Mexico and East Asian countries), but it seems unlikely that many will be included. It is hard, for example, to imagine US governments having the political energy to undertake many more of the kind of negotiations now taking place with Mexico. Quite possibly, 4 billion of the world's population will be locked outside these blocs. Those already among the least successful group of countries will be worst hit. A Third World grouping, with an articulated common platform, to negotiate with the blocs might offer some hope. But the chances of it being resurrected seem remote.●

Melvyn Westlake is the former managing editor of South magazine.

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Globalisation

Europe's Other Self

The history of Europe is not only internal, but external: its relation with its Others. **Stuart Hall** examines the impact of fundamentalism and Third World migration on European identity

We are advancing steadily towards two anniversary occasions for Europe. The countdown has already begun to 1992, the birthday of the new Europe. Despite the rearguard action of the Thatcherite rump, the supranational shape of the new Europe is beginning to emerge. This occasion will be inward-looking – the lowering of economic and trading barriers, the opening of convergence and integration which everyone hopes will bring prosperity to western European peoples. Here, it is the waning of the era of the separate nation-states, which have for so long provided the engine of European growth. Once again, Europe is able to produce from within her own borders and resources, both material and spiritual, the conditions for the next phase of social development. This has been the dominant narrative of modernity for some time – an 'internalist' story, with capitalism growing from the womb of feudalism and Europe's self-generating capacity to produce, like a silk-worm, the circumstances of her own evolution from within her own body.

The other anniversary marks another, equally important, but less frequently celebrated aspect. 1992 is also the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's so-called 'discovery' of the New World. This event, along with the Portuguese opening-up of the African coastline and advance (with the assistance of Arab traders who had long plied those waters) into the Indian Ocean and beyond, marked the opening of the era of European expansion – the process of exploration, conquest and colonisation by which virtually the whole globe was harnessed in one way or another to Europe. 'Globalisation', which we often speak of as if it began with the 'Big Bang', and the computerisation of the Stock Exchange, really started there with Columbus's 'mistake', and has been going on ever since. (He was really on the way somewhere else and remained stubbornly convinced, when he hit the New World, that, like any other good European businessman, he had arrived in Japan.)

Europe's external relations with its Others has been central to the European story since its inception, and remains so. The story of European identity is often told as if it had no exterior. But this tells us more about how cultural identities are constructed – as 'imagined communities', through the marking of difference with others – than it does about the actual relations of unequal exchange and uneven development through which a common European identity was forged. Now that a new Europe is taking shape, the same contradictory process of marking symbolic boundaries and constructing symbolic frontiers between inside and outside, interior and exterior, belonging and otherness, is providing a silent accompaniment to the march to 1992.

One of the key sites of this discursive work is, of course, eastern Europe – a boundary which has always given western Europe trouble. Westwards, what used to be called 'the Green Sea of Darkness' provided a natural boundary. But eastwards, the continent refuses to end naturally. It stretches out to the Urals and beyond, into the dark unknown from which the barbarians descended. Where does Europe stop and Asia begin? The question is critical – European prosperity depends on finding an answer to it. In the negotiations between European capitalism and the disintegrating communist empires of eastern Europe – the Second World – we are about to discover the answer.

Currently, the line is staked out in terms of the contrast between the 'international' West and the 'nationalist' East. As national boundaries are weakened and eroded in western Europe, we are told, so in eastern Europe there is a resurgence of nationalism. The contrast between the 'rational' and civilised West and the irrational and barbarous East underpins this opposition. Of course, many of the nationalisms which are helping to fragment the old communist empire are driven by ethnic absolutism, hatred of difference, racial exclusiveness and religious orthodoxy. But it ill behoves western Europe to complain. Its own development occurred on the back of nationalisms which also had their own racially and ethnically exclusive character. It is not a surprise that the Croatians, the Slovenes, the Latvians, the Estonians, etc, should regard the construction of a little nation of their own as a passport to the West. These emergent nationalisms are not simply revivals of the past but reworkings of it in the circumstances of the present – entry tickets to the new Europe. Though they look like a return to a pre-1914 historical agenda, they are functioning as a way of evading the past and making a bid for modernity (ie, entry to the Euro-club).

As Europe consolidates and converges, so a similar exercise in boundary maintenance is in progress with respect to its Third World 'Others'. Currently, the two favourite discursive markers in this discourse are 'refugees' and 'fundamentalism'. The question of illegal immigration has once again surfaced as an urgent topic of European discussion, the redoubtable French Socialist prime minister, Edith Cresson, regretting that 'of every ten immigrants found to be here illegally, only three are expelled', and Jacques Chirac, that model of the new European cosmopolitan enlightenment, remarking on the 'noise and smell' of foreigners which drove decent French people 'understandably crazy'. Douglas Hurd and Kenneth Baker have been spinning complicated webs around the distinction between 'political refugees' and 'economic migrants'. Political refugees deserve refuge in enlightened Europe, home of liberty. Usually they are few in number, and it is often hard to prove conclusively that they are in direct danger from some oppressive or tyrannical regime of the kind which poverty and indebtedness breeds – which allows a reasonable proportion to be bundled unceremoniously back to the waiting arms of the local police.

Economic migrants, on the other hand, are simply the unwitting casualties of the 'normal' processes of market forces as they operate at the periphery. Europe, whose banking arrangements have destroyed subsistence agriculture and whose new Gatt arrangements will price most of them out of the commodity markets, owes them nothing. It is true that, Tebbit-like, they got on their bikes (or the nearest equivalent – a one-way charter flight ticket) and, quite rationally, went to seek their fortunes in the only place where fortunes are to be made. But this will never do. Suddenly, European prosperity is a strictly European affair, designed exclusively for what every self-respecting Euro-politician is calling 'our populations'. No wonder, when the Berlin Wall collapsed, every self-respecting Pole and East German who had a Lada capable of making the jour-

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ney climbed aboard, and like Columbus in search of pure gold, headed west. The frontiers are closing...

The problem is (as Colin Prescod's excellent BBC2 series, *Black On Europe*, about the plight of western Europe's ethnic minorities, has been showing) the 'barbarians' are already inside the gate; and face-to-face with them, European cosmopolitanism does not stand up well to the test. Millions of Muslims in France, Sudanese and Ethiopians in Italy, Turks and Africans in Germany, Portugal, Spain, Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in Britain, Indonesians and Surinamese in Holland, bear witness, not only to the actual mechanisms of 'globalisation' but to the difficulty of sloughing off in one easy movement Europe's long colonial past or keeping the periphery in place.

The so-called 'homogeneous populations' of the new Europe – the ethnic absolutism on which the new 'openness' is being constructed – has always been, at best, an elaborate metaphor. As Daffyd Ellis Thomas, the Plaid Cymru MP, recently pointed out, no single western European state corresponds to one people. The Slovenes, like the Scots, the Welsh and the Basques, may hope to bring into existence a nation which is a state – that is, a state which is the expression of a homogeneous ethnic group. But all the major European nations are already hybridised – multicultural. And now this is compounded by the most astonishing aspect of 'globalisation' – the tidal wave of migrations which it has stimulated. Peoples, drawn inexorably through the laws of uneven development into the networks of a globalised world system, and long accustomed to dwell simultaneously in the 'local' worlds of traditional societies and the 'global' worlds of international capital, have simply packed their few belongings and set out – legally or illegally – to cross those visible and invisible frontiers designed to keep them immured in the 'backwardness' of their ethnic particularisms, in search of the far side of Paradise. Every major European and North American city today is a multi-cultural metropolis.

The category of 'fundamentalism', revived with new vigour somewhere between the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, is the latest mechanism whose frontier effect is designed to keep the migrating millions on the other side of the fence. It collapses the extraordinary diversity and proliferation of difference which is the law of globalisation into the simplifying oppositions of Western rationalism, modernity and liberal tolerance of one side, versus the retreat into the irrationalism of ethnic and religious particularism. Would that liberalism and fundamentalism were so easy to distribute into their respective spaces. Of course, there are 'fundamentalist' regimes in the world; and their retreat into racial purity, religious orthodoxy and a rigid cultural traditionalism has done nothing for the millions of poor people languishing under their rule. The view, held by some western radicals, that because these regimes (sometimes) oppose the West we should support them, is a profound error, forced on us by the fact that we continue to work with these simple binary oppositions. We might call this, following Marx's remark about anti-semitism, not 'the socialism', but the 'anti-imperialism of fools'. There was a lot of it about during the Gulf war on the dubious grounds that, because Saddam Hussein was 'bad news' for Washington, he must be somehow 'good news' for the Iraqis. Whereas, what poor people in the Third World need, against the oligarchic regimes which have often risen to power with the aid of western governments and arms merchants, is more, not less democracy – just like us.

As a concept designed to help us understand the rapidly shifting relations between the different 'worlds', fundamentalism is virtually useless. Islam, the principal culprit in this fundamentalist discourse, is an immensely diverse set of peoples, beliefs, traditions and practices. What it shares with Christianity is more extensive than that between any other world religion. It may be the fact that they are so close which makes them such implacable enemies – think of the way Christian, Jewish and Islamic theological history converges on Jerusalem. 'Fundamentalism' as a term is a way of suppressing this diversity, forgetting a shared history too involuted to submit to simplifying slogans, of refusing to live with difference. In fact, Muslim responses to the Ayatollah's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie were much more varied than has been recognised; and they had as much to do with the local contexts and historical conjunctures in which they were expressed as the 'essential fundamentalism' they were taken to represent.

If what we mean by 'fundamentalism' is a defensive and exclusive retreat into a rigid and unchanging version of the past inhabited as Truth, then there is plenty of it about, not least in the so-called 'modern West'. The attempt to shore up the market-driven destruction of the social fabric of British society during the Thatcher years by an appeal to Victorian values, the evocation of Britannia Resurgent in the Falklands war, the Thatcher-Tebbit test of 'are you one of us?', the stout defence of 'Englishness' which is being inscribed by diktat through the National Curriculum in schools, the backlash, both here and with much greater vigour and venom in the US, against 'multiculturalism' – these are but a few of the outward and manifest signs that a kind of fundamentalism is alive and well at the centre of 'modernity'. Some would argue that it has stood at the side of modernity – the Enlightenment's 'dark shadow' – from its inception.

In fact, 'globalisation' (which carries the ring of modernity and cosmopolitanism about it) and 'fundamentalism' are not opposites but complementary; two sides of the same coin. As the new forms of globalisation unhinge the negotiated compromises between tradition and modernity in the Third World, the process calls into being in response a vigourous 'localism'. Localism can be purely defensive – inward-turning, exclusive, absolutist, a retreat into an enclave form of ethnicity. But there are many 'ethnicities', just as there are many types of nationalism, not all of them harnessed irreversibly to a reactionary politics, as over-rationalist versions of both liberalism and marxism once claimed. The construction of alternative local histories and cultures can be a resource for building the future, not just a return to the 'safe haven' of the past: an *invention* rather than simply a rediscovery of tradition, which provides marginalised people with the cultural means to construct those new identities and counter-narratives without which they cannot survive, let alone contest and negotiate with the West on anything approaching equal terms.

'Where does Europe stop and Asia begin? The question is critical – European prosperity depends on finding the answer to it'

This is why, paradoxically, in the era of globalisation, the margins, the periphery, the 'local', has time and again proved to be culturally the most productive space. Face to face with the contradictory realities of 'globalisation', *everybody* is discovering their ethnicity: not the purity of their origins, which in a migrating world is impossible to discover, but simply the fact that they come from particular places, speak particular languages, inhabit distinctive cultural traditions, belong to particular landscapes and share with many others who are not 'the same' as them, particular histories. In short, living with, rather than simply forgetting, 'difference'. This is preferable to the endless forgetting – the historical amnesia – coupled with a vapid postmodern nostalgia which is globalisation's stock-in-trade.

Identity is always an open, complex and unfinished game – always 'under construction' (in Europe as much as in the Middle East, Africa or the Caribbean). It always moves into the future by a symbolic detour through the past. It produces new subjects. But they always bear the indelible traces of those specific histories, traditions and cultures through which identities form themselves – produce themselves anew. The people of the periphery have no other cultural resources with which to defend themselves against the homogenising 'indifference' of globalisation, no other languages in which to define a different, more vernacular, set of modernities for themselves. In this sense, the rise of ethnicity (only some variants of which are 'fundamentalist') is one of the products of 'globalisation' – the most subversive of its many unintended consequences.●

Stuart Hall is professor of sociology at the Open University.

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Africa
African Nightmare

The bleakest story of the Third World is Africa. **Michael Holman** explores the tragedy of a continent, while **Glenys Kinnock** sees hope for South Africa

Keith Bernstein/Select

Sub-Saharan Africa is in the grip of a crisis that may well become a catastrophe beyond the capacity of Africans alone to resolve, but played out before a world preoccupied by other concerns.

Some 30m Africans face starvation; another 450m or so across the continent struggle for survival, amidst political turmoil which has left barely a country untouched. Almost wherever one looks, from Angola to Zambia, from Mali to Mozambique, the ossified political structures of post-independence Africa are cracking. From across the continent come calls for multi-party systems. Political adjustment is catching up with the economic adjustment programmes under way in more than 30 African states.

The cry for democracy, however, is as much a moan of pain and despair caused by the economic failures over three decades of independence. There are glimmerings of hope: southern Africa, liberated from apartheid, is moving towards peace and rehabilitation; and prospects for the Horn of Africa have improved in the wake of President Mengistu Haile Mariam's departure. But the political and economic process under way in Africa is complex and fragile, and the continent is delicately poised between reform and further decline.

The crisis is deep-rooted, and in those roots lie at least part of the explanation of some of today's problems. The sad record of the independence years, disfigured by over 70 coups, the emergence of military regimes and authoritarian one-party states, and a steady decline, dominate impressions of the continent.

Yet as with Yugoslavia, to understand contemporary Africa one must go back to the events of the last century and earlier. The Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) recent call on the West to make 'reparation' for the slave trade to the West Indies and the Americas is almost risible in its sheer impracticality. But this should not obscure the lasting impact this trauma has had on the continent.

What is sometimes described as Africa's holocaust finally ended barely 100 years ago. It was, as Basil Davidson writes in his book about the slave business, *Mother Africa*, the greatest forced migration in the history of humanity. Between 1650 and 1850, the period when the trade flourished, some 12m slaves were landed in the Americas, according to one estimate. It is calculated that 2m perished on the journey and 7m died before embarkation.

The experience left African communities shattered, villages bereft of the able-bodied, and ethnic states and kingdoms destabilised.

Yet as slavery was coming to an end another traumatic period was beginning. In what became known as 'the scramble for Africa', Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Italy and Spain all staked territorial claims, in the process usually disregarding the boundaries of the indigenous nation-states of Africa and overturning the societies they encountered.

'One of the most serious consequences of European colonisation in Africa', writes the historian Ali Mazrui, in his book, *The Africans*, 'has been the destruction of Africa's own legitimate institutions and structures of authority'. He continues: 'The initial military triumph of European power over the local rulers was itself enough of a strain on the historic prestige of indigenous monarchies and institutions of governance. But that initial European military triumph was followed by decades of European overlordship, with policies deliberately calculated to change the nature of Africa's political processes for ever'.

Africa's post-independence failure to develop durable and democratic political systems and institutions – an important factor behind the continent's current malaise – is at least in part explained by the past.

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Freedom Sounds

Nigel Dickinson

Apartheid is dying. But if the post-apartheid needs of South Africa do not get proper attention, the consequences of institutionalised racism could haunt generations to come. If political changes are not translated into tangible social changes, the legacy of the system which a majority government will inherit could well leave an indelible mark. The newly acquired freedoms of South Africans must be genuine and real. They will need more than applause and congratulations from us.

South Africans see their political rights as both ends and means. They are an expression of their dignity as free human beings and the instrument for full economic, social and political rights in the future. There is anxiety among black South Africans that the current focus on political change has camouflaged the enormous needs which span all aspects of social and economic life.

Experience has shown that all too often support can be generated for political change, but once that is achieved the support for building a new society can be more difficult to maintain. Namibia is an example of this. I visited Namibia as an observer of the election process in 1989. I felt the outrage which any democrat would feel in a country whose riches were being denied to the majority by a minority of 7000 whites, and by an apartheid system which spent vast amounts of money applying its bigoted obsession, having created 11 different racial and tribal authorities.

Yet Namibia's first faltering steps out of the darkness of injustice, poverty and oppression have not been met with the strong international support they need. This should be a warning to those who predict that the post-apartheid needs of South Africa will gain an easy and generous response.

Already there is optimism about change in South Africa. But even when the constitutional changes do take place, the people who face the everyday reality of life in the townships and impoverished rural areas of South Africa know that their task is just beginning. A free and non-racial society must be allowed to prosper, and must also be given the practical assistance required to make freedom a reality as well as an inspiration.

Black South Africans, after years of repression and deprivation, look forward to adequate health care and housing; to schools which are open to all for as long as required; to training for jobs irrespective of colour, gender or religion. At the grassroots, many organisations in South Africa naturally share these hopes and aspirations.

The inequalities inherent in decades of racism have left people with a huge task in trying to cope, for instance, with the diseases of poverty, epidemic among South African children. A development agenda for a democratic South Africa has, however, been formulated by people's organisations inside the country. Its shape and framework are becoming visible. A key feature of the analysis is the fear that less organised people will not gain their full share of the benefits offered by a post-apartheid South Africa.

Women, especially those in the rural areas, for example, may be in danger of being almost entirely neglected. And yet women – the mothers and producers – should be central to the development process and part of the implementation and evaluation of programmes. Those people, marginalised by their poverty and relative powerlessness, should be drawn in to develop the assets, services and skills in ways which they themselves feel appropriate.

Development is clearly understood by South African organisations to be an integral part of social and economic change. They are already committed to development work which, especially in the areas of education and training, strengthens and empowers local communities. Local people are being supported as they manage the resources they already have and are prepared for a future which will offer increased resources.

South Africa's community and development organisations have been used to meeting their own needs within the context of a hostile and repressive political environment. Courage, imagination, ingenuity, and effort have already gone into providing health, education, childcare and advice centres throughout the country. The experience and knowledge which has been gained by those working for the transformation from apartheid to democracy should be encouraged and harnessed. A real opportunity exists for development to occur supported by the enabling power of a new democratic state.

For non-governmental organisations in South Africa, life under a properly constituted and elected government will be a liberating experience. However, for everyone there will be the difficulties, conflicts and tensions which change will bring. There is no place for naive hopes of instant transformation and none will be given. Instead, the courage and resourcefulness which local communities have shown in the anti-apartheid struggle can now, with practical support, become the engine of change which will benefit everyone.●

Glenys Kinnock

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come the contemporary catalysts for change: grinding hardship, frustration with three decades of autocrats, the inspiration of eastern Europe, and the rapprochement of the super powers. All give momentum to a process which is as profound as the battle for decolonialisation, which brought most of the continent to independence in the late 1950s and 1960s.

But the combination of painful economic reform without adequate external resources, and political upheaval without proper constitutional alternatives, may be more than Africa can bear.

Famine, more the consequence of war than weather, is the starkest sympton of an increasingly fragile continent, but not the only one.

The 1980s were the decade of Africa's enervation. Average per capita income fell by a quarter during the period. Mortality among children under five in sub-Saharan Africa exceeds 180 deaths per 1,000, while in Sweden it is fewer than 10. If you live in Switzerland, your life expectancy is nearly 80; in Sierra Leone, you can anticipate half that span. It is likely to get worse. 'Even by 2000 average incomes in Africa will be less than 1980', says the 1991 World Bank Development Report.

Further horror is yet to come. Aids is spreading. Health workers fear that 1m people could die in the next decade, many from among Africa's skilled urban class – civil servants and factory workers, miners and politicians – on whom the implementation of recovery programmes greatly depends.

Erosion of this precious expertise comes on top of the terrible damage already wrought by one-party systems and the military regimes. The civil service has become subservient to presidential decree and is seldom a source of independent advice. The integrity of the judiciary has been eroded or eliminated. Trade unions have been emasculated. National assemblies often do little more than act as a rubber stamp.

The political parties that were formed in the fervour of nationalism have ossified, and for the most part are incapable of inspiring loyalty or galvanising disillusioned citizens into action. All this raises the disturbing possibility that Africa no longer has the adequate institutional capacity to help itself.

This has not diminished the enthusiasm with which the post-independence generation of Africa battles for democracy. But they have yet to fill the constitutional vacuum left behind by collapsing one-party states.

The continent's advocates of multi-party democracy have much the same problem as Pooh Bear had with his song 'Ho! for the life of a bear'. Readers may recall that Pooh managed the first line without any difficulty, but was then stuck for ideas. Perhaps if I sing the first line very quickly twice over, he mused, the rest will just come to me. He did but it didn't.

The first line of the democracy song can be heard on the streets of Abidjan, Lubumbashi, Lusaka, Nairobi and elsewhere. Out with whatever authoritarian figure has been in power for decades, and in with a multi-party system, goes the opening line. The second line, if there is one, starts with a call for a bill of rights and a free press, and then tails off. This is splendid, as far as it goes. But some hard questions need to be asked.

Why did the multi-party system in Africa fail in the first place? What additional checks and balances can be introduced to curb executive power, given that the usual ones – such as an independent judiciary – were so rapidly and easily eroded? As Nigeria's former military leader, General Olusegun Obasanjo, has pointed out, he presided over a return to civilian rule in 1979 after multi-party elections under an admirable constitution. But the military were back in power after four years of corruption and mismanagement by political parties 'stratified on a tribal basis', notes Obasanjo.

How does Africa cope with the fact that many of its boundaries were drawn either arbitrarily or strategically, leaving pre-colonial nations divided? What role is there for chiefs and traditional spiritual leaders? Above all, how does Africa deal with that most sensitive issue, tribalism? As long as voters feel a primary loyalty to tribe rather than ideology, there is the likelihood that political parties in Africa will reflect ethnic divisions.

'Africa's post-independence failure to develop durable and democratic political systems — an important factor behind the continent's current malaise — is in part explained by the past'

Undoubtedly Africa's imagination has been caught by events in eastern Europe. Many of its governments are as a result shakier, losing important allies. It is developments in South Africa, however, which could have the most impact on the African upheaval underway, and be most relevant to the continent's future.

Apartheid has done appalling harm in the Republic. The defenders of apartheid have wrought great damage on their neighbours, using economic muscle or military might. But the malign influence has spread even further. It has helped stifle legitimate debate in Africa and elsewhere about ways in which ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences can be accommodated, and about how minorities can protect themselves.

Apartheid made public debate of these issues if not taboo, then highly sensitive. There seemed to be an overriding concern that no shred of intellectual comfort should be given Verwoerd and his successors, however bizarre and irrational might be the link between recognising and accommodating ethnic tensions, and white subjugation of black South Africa.

That may be changing. A senior official in an African one-party state, where the government is under growing pressure, recently spoke frankly about the difficulties of introducing a multi-party system when Africa's post-independence history had shown that a winner-takes-all system had failed. Ways had to be found, he said, to ensure that the legitimate interests of tribes or minorities were represented at all levels of government, without too much dilution of executive authority.

A few days earlier, a cabinet minister in Cape Town made remarkably similar points. But it was the black African and not his white counterpart who made the assertion: 'Ethnicity and how to cope with it will be the issue for Africa in the 1990s'. It is time Africa's leaders in the wings brought this concern into the open, and moved on from the opening lines of their song.

But whatever the outcome of debate on appropriate constitutional models, Africa desperately needs more help. The continent is almost as impoverished today as it was 30 years ago. It is the only region in the world whose debt is now greater than its total economic output, Barber Conable, the World Bank president, noted recently. More will become impoverished as the years go by. Africa's population is expected to double to about 1 billion over the next 20 years, unless fertility rates drop – or Aids makes nonsense of demographic trends.

Help on the scale needed is not likely to be forthcoming. Africa has become marginalised in every way. Its share of world trade has fallen since 1960. A generation of diplomats and journalists and businessmen who made their careers on the continent and pressed its case have retired; the new generation looks to Asia, or Europe or the US. African diplomats fail lamentably to plead their continent's cause, and the OAU provokes ridicule.

The Africa lobby is thus weak. Yet Africa's plight matters, and not simply because there should be a humanitarian imperative to help. The cost of inaction over Africa will not simply be more famines and more African governments imploding, ceasing to exist as nation states, as in the case of Liberia or Somalia.

It will be an unhealthy Africa which ultimately means an unhealthy world. In an interdependent world, countries and continents are vulnerable to each other's misfortunes. African deforestation may contribute to global warming; plants which could provide important genetic material for crop or medical research may be lost; diseases such as Aids know no boundaries; Muslim extremism in Africa, a potentially destabilising issue in Nigeria, could pose a new terrorist threat; immigration from west and north Africa is an increasingly sensitive issue in southern Europe.

'It may well be', said one participant at a recent gathering of aid officials and politicians, 'that only when the West fears for the welfare of its own next generation will it be sufficiently motivated to address Africa's disaster'.●

Michael Holman is Africa editor of the Financial Times

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Africa
Has Bob Lost His Voice?

In the 80s, **Bob Geldof** and Live Aid transformed popular attitudes to Third World aid. **Martin Jacques** talks to him about Africa's continuing crisis

Bob Geldof is a pop star, formerly with the Boomtown Rats. He organised the relief project Band Aid, that led to the groundbreaking Live Aid pop concert to raise money for Africa in 1985. He has since recorded two solo albums, *Deep In The Heart Of Nowhere* and *The Vegetarians Of Love*. He is married to Paula Yates and has two children.

Band Aid '84, Live Aid '85, Sport Aid '86, what did they achieve?

In concrete terms you can add up wells and dams and cows and tools and things like that. You might say well, we're back at square one in 1991. But most of the people who were helped are probably still alive. Then in political terms it took an issue that was nowhere on the political agenda and put it squarely at the top. That manifested itself over the long term in a change of laws governing attitudes towards Africa. And finally, the debate on Africa at the UN was completely hopeless, but it was the first one they had ever had that dealt with the issues of the moment. More importantly, people imagined that the 80s were characterised by an interest in the here and now; it may have put a wider perspective on things. Certainly younger people, probably for the first time in their lives, thought about another part of the world, and their responsibility towards other people.

Do you think that, ironically, it was the prevailing selfishness of the 80s which made Live Aid possible?

I dispute the suggestion that people were selfish in the 80s. There was a prevailing macho ethic to go for the kill, but 18 year-olds have always been on the make and they've always gone for it. For me, the 80s were characterised by generosity and warmth and fellowship. Take Live Aid, these people in one of the wealthiest capitals of the world, on a beautiful hot summer's day, were watching the biggest pop stars on the planet and they were just shocked and horrified and crying as they watched that video of the people in Africa, and so that sensibility was never far below the surface.

Was Live Aid a major turning point? Did it represent a change of perception in the importance of the crisis of Africa and the Third World?

There have been charity concerts in the past and essentially it was taking an idea that had been done before and taking a problem that had been seen endlessly before – famine – and selling it back to people as something real and tangible. I think the difference was that I refused to use party politics with regard to it. I really did see it and still see it as a moral issue, where you are offended as an individual and ashamed that you can allow it to happen. Never mind saying, 'Oh, governments... ', the reality is that even if you increase your overseas aid by 100%, it really makes no difference on the impact on Africa.

It is a major problem that has got to be understood in terms of economic finance, global politics, environmental degradation, social structures. But first you have to address it in very simple terms. Is it absurd that people die of hunger in a world of surplus? Right or left, the answer is yes. OK so let's do something. It was a very simple proposition, and I intuitively understood something that the charities didn't, which is marketing. I said at the time, I don't mind using glamour to sell something that is so notoriously unglamorous.

In a sense, you redefined in people's minds what the Third World's problem was, the extent to which it mattered. But six years on you've got another big crisis in Ethiopia and the Sudan, you've got people talking about aid fatigue, and the crises that have been taking place in other parts of the Third World, the Gulf and elsewhere, have to some extent pushed the African tragedy into the background. How do you see the situation now?

It would be very hard to do something like Live Aid again at this moment. People expect results very quickly, and if they don't happen they become disillusioned. So we tend to prioritise our compassion, and I think we can only take on board so much and then we tend to feel that it's beyond us; what can individuals do, what can one government do? People, now, tend to think more geo-politically, more globally. In a world where you have the Gulf crisis or you have the Bangladeshi flood, and then you have Africa again, people will only respond to that which they feel can be dealt with now. If you want to solve the problem of Africa, it is possible but it's a huge problem. It would mean addressing things like the EC, which I actually believe is a cartel. I think that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is madness, and I am bound to agree with Mrs Thatcher with regard to the fact that it is a rich man's club.

Since '89, there's the sense of the old world order breaking up, the collapse of the communist world. That has had a paradoxical effect on people. On the one hand, it says to them, 'We're all interdependent, we can make and remake the globe', but on the other hand it makes them feel impotent, because there's things that seem so much beyond their control, like Yugoslavia flaring up.

Well, anyone with half a brain could see that coming. Everyone agreed what we would see in the vacuum created between the collapse of totalitarian systems and a society that has no democratic structures. I think it's right that people preoccupy themselves with the East at the moment because it is such a volatile situation. If Europe is not at peace with itself there's a great threat to the rest of the world that will put the African situation in the shade. The priority must be to come to terms with this.

There's maybe a lesson for what's possible with regard to Africa – knowing that it's only through massive aid to the East that we can help them to establish a new political consensus, new democratic structures, new industry. But if the East is the immediate danger to us in the West, and it is, let's be quite clear about this, it is also true that if Africa is allowed to flounder further, millions upon millions of people will leave and try to get into this cartel that exists to the North.

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Photography: Abel Lagos

'If Europe is not at peace with itself there's a great threat to the rest of the world that will put the African situation in the shade'

So you are arguing that, for the moment, Africa's lower down the priority list, but is going to re-emerge, because of Western self-interest, through migration, ecological disaster and so forth?

I think so, it doesn't mean that we should forget Africa, because we cannot. 30m people going hungry is simply ludicrous. But politically we must look at the East for our own protection. The East is less of a human tragedy, in fact it's a human story of rebirth; that is not true in Africa, it's a human story of death. But we can't exclude them from our priorities. It may seem implausible, but I've seen millions on the move in Africa. I've seen them ignore borders completely and move into other tribal areas. The net result is war. Ultimately they won't be able to move anywhere within Africa itself and they'll begin to look at the fleshpots to the North, and they'll want in. I'm not painting a picture of the apocalypse, I'm postulating something that environmentalists have been talking about for years. It's better to deal with it now than later.

Admittedly, I think it was impossible to deal with it before because the political leadership in most of the African countries was frankly appalling. They have been generally irresponsible, not to say corrupt, in huge numbers of cases. Until now you really have not seen the growth of anything that could be accepted as responsible leadership, with the exception of people like Mugabe. Their great mistake is that they're always moaning on about colonialism. But a lot of it is to do with the fact that they themselves imported essentially European 19th-century nostrums in the form of Adam Smith or Karl Marx which cannot apply to the African situation.

You have said that what's happening in the East is rebirth and what's happening in Africa is death. What are the conditions for a political and social rebirth in Africa?

God knows; they certainly don't. The effect of Gorbachev throughout the world is profound – the Soviet Union understanding that it was not a world empire, that its ideology was in effect bankrupt. Now you suddenly find these Albanian marxists are trumpeting social markets. I find it utterly bizarre; how do you suddenly turn round and say oops? Like Mugabe – there he was, going for the single party state, and at the last moment he says, 'Well comrades, we're just going to have to go for a multi-party democracy'. It's so weird, it's like walking along up the King's Road and going along with the latest thing from the Boy shop, except it has a profound effect on people's lives. These fuckers have slaughtered millions of people in the name of some idea they can suddenly throw out blithely at the next party conference. What really has to be taken on board is that people must be allowed to breathe free, they must be allowed to grow their crops. Any ideology, be it the market, capitalism, or socialism, any imposition on the natural order of people, will wreak havoc.

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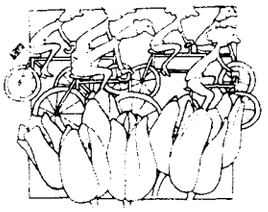

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So you're saying a combination of pragmatism and tolerance...
Yes, what is needed is tolerance and an understanding. I really am suspicious of nationalism, coming from a country where it has wreaked nothing but misery, and pain. I really despise it. Little Ireland nauseated me and I came to a country where suddenly Little Englandism was on the rise. Little Europe nauseates me just as much.

Except, you've got to say this, that one of the achievements of west European development has been the postwar decline of nationalism.
Well, I'd agree with that up to a point, except that everywhere I look I don't find a decline in nationalism in Ireland, Britain – I should say England, Scotland, Wales – in Catalonia, East and West Germany. The Dutch are very frightened of their language and culture being swamped. The French are notoriously chauvinistic.

You view this as a fairly general and bleak global development?
I don't see it as necessarily bleak. I think it's necessary to understand who you are. I don't believe this is a multicultural society. England is England and always shall be and I quite like it being England.

I would like people who come here to accept its cultures and its nostrums and I think that if you come to an understanding, bit by bit you begin to work together. Africa still has to find its own national identities, because they've tried to wrest themselves into being nation-states which, in effect, they're not.

But what you could get in a disaster situation is the West worrying about its own interests. You could get, not exactly an old style imperialism, but a latterday, to some extent benign, form of intervention, particularly as African governments haven't been able to get their acts together.
There have always been benign interventions. Like the World Bank – I don't think there's an agenda to fuck up Africa purposely, but in effect they were putting in money there because they thought they were into a sure thing: well, countries don't go down the tube do they! Yes, they do. And they've been sorely bitten. Now, we cannot allow the bank to go down the tube. I mean the Savings and Loan scandal in America which has cost God knows how much, is one thing, but if the banks follow suit because of non-payment of debt, you are going to have the mother of all financial crises, as Saddam might have said. And I don't think that could ever be allowed to happen. So you're going to have this constant rescheduling of debt. Both the IMF and the World Bank have tried to impose these impossible conditions – this ludicrous idea that for every $3 of aid they get they have to give back $10 in the international debt...

'Is it absurd that people die of hunger in a world of surplus? Right or left, the answer is yes'

The best single way is to cancel the debt?
Absolutely. I believe that, and I know there are ways of doing it.

You were a unique political figure of the 1980s. You had a new kind of movement. There's never been anything before or since like that. Do you see yourself as picking up some of the threads of that era or are you just going to stick to your band?
Well, the short answer is I'm going to stick to my band because – a million people disagree – it's what I do best and it's what I enjoy doing. The creation of an institution is anathema to me. Band Aid could simply have continued, but I didn't want the name to be meaningless and simply a repository for money, it would cease to be a political lobby. It was never political, but by its size it could influence change. Whatever I responded to on the box, self-evidently billions of people felt the same. But I can't solve the African problem, Band Aid could not, we made that quite clear. The name itself, 'Band Aid' – you can't put a bandaid on a gaping wound. But what created the famine in '84 still created the one in '91.

I don't think those poor people will ever be left alone, either by us or by their supposed rulers. It's a terrible stew. I won't stop thinking about it. I won't stop talking about it if I'm asked. But I'm allowed to stamp my heel in a tantrum because people can always fall back on the excuse that he's just a pop star.●

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United States

Yankee Doodle Dandy

The US has been seen by the Left as the traditional enemy, not least in the Third World. **Fred Halliday** calls for a new and more positive attitude

One of the most widely held, and universally unchallenged, tenets of the Left over the past four decades or more has been its hostility to the US: not just to the imperialist dimension of US foreign policy in its economic and military relations with the Third World, most evident in the war in Vietnam, but also to the US political and cultural system as a whole. 'Anti-Americanism' is a term often used by defenders of US policy to discredit any criticism of what Washington is doing: but, stripped of this smear character, it does quite accurately characterise an attitude, prevalent on much of the European Left, towards all that America stands for, or is supposed to stand for.

Three things about this attitude are immediately obvious. First, while often phrased in Left terms, it is by no means specific to the Left. Broad conservative and snobbish hostility to the US, its culture and politics, is a stock in trade of much of the European Right, especially in France. Secondly, while widely held on the left, it accords with a remarkable and pervasive ignorance of, and lack of interest in, US politics and society: anyone organising a socialist conference or speakers' programme will know that it is much easier to get an expert on Nicaragua, or Palestine, or South Africa than to get someone who can talk informatively about the politics of the US, domestic or foreign. It is as if, since we all know how terrible the place is, and how uniquely pernicious its influence, there is no need to probe further. Whatever else, this attitude greatly overstates the degree of homogeneity within the US, and ignores the very diverse political, as well as cultural, forces operating within it.

The third, and most significant, problem with this broad 'anti-Americanism' is that, precisely because it ignores how diverse US political life and influence are, in certain key respects it misrepresents the recent impact of the US on western Europe and on the development of the Left in Europe. The formation of the European Left in the early part of this century owes little to the US, although it is worth remembering that the day celebrating the struggles of the working class, 1 May, is of US origin. In the post-1945 context, however, for all the talk of the influence of the Second, communist, World, and of the Third World, the greatest source of radical ideas in Europe has been the US: the civil rights movement and its later, anti-racist, variants; the student movement; the anti-war movement; women's liberation; gay liberation. Current campaigns for a bill of rights, freedom of information, greater power for regions all derive support from the US example, as do demands that the head of state pay taxes, and that primary and secondary

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schooling be free of charge.

There are many aspects of US society that are, compared to western Europe, pernicious – the absence of welfare programmes, the incidence of crime and drugs, the prevalence of fundamentalist religious bodies, to name but three. But the complacent attitude held by left and right in Europe alike, that in all respects US society is more backward than that of the old world, simply does not hold up. The US, not least in the aftermath of the Gulf war, exhibits a strong vein of cultural and great power arrogance, but it is hardly for the British, the French, the Germans, or even the Spaniards, to claim superiority in that domain. The US, like Germany, has a lot to teach this country, and others, about decentralisation and regional rights. The attitude of the state to information and the rights of citizens is far superior to that of the closed, arrogant, states of western Europe. Attitudes to gender are far more advanced.

On an issue that is looming as perhaps the major controversy of the 1990s, immigration, the US has a wholly different, and more positive, historical experience: there is little talk in the US about the dangers of 'dilution' and up to one third of all the people now living in the US were born outside it. On the racial front the great failure of US society has been the treatment of Afro-Americans, a consequence of history and the failure to resolve its legacy which Americans, quick to scorn others for their obsession with the past, would do well to bear in mind. But, in other respects, the US is a far more successful and vibrant multi-racial society and offers greater opportunity for integration than does any society in the stuffy world of Europe. The Hong Kong Chinese who declined to come to Britain and chose instead to get to the US knew what they were doing.

European cultural hostility to the US tends to rest on a curious inconsistency. Great stress is laid on the 'vulgarity' of much US culture, and its pernicious influence on television, language, music and the like. Much of this critique is valid: more rubbish is produced in the US, and sold around the world, than by any other society. But the cultural impact of the US has also been of immense positive value: the impact of jazz, of pop music, of quality Hollywood, of US literature, theatre and art have made as great a contribution to the culture of the world as any other nation in the 20th century. In Britain, there is particular sensitivity about the impact on the English language: here again, it is arguable that the enrichment of the spoken language over recent years is as much as anything a result of American influence, mediating as it does Yiddish, West Indian, Latin American and other elements as well as changes within spoken English in the US itself. It would be curious indeed if the Left ended up defending the inviolability and unchangeability of language.

When it comes to judgement of the US's international role, similar problems, of establishing a position critical of US policy and craven Atlanticism, but distinct from a dogmatic anti-Americanism, arise. Again, the choice is not just between critique and acceptance, but between a critique that is simplistic and one that is informed and measured. There is considerable, legitimate hostility to the US influence in Europe but the failure to produce anything but the platitudes of anti-Americanism has been one of the factors contributing to the continued US presence in Europe, in the form of Nato and the Atlantic alliance. Lest anyone underestimate the strength of attachment to this form of US link, they should remember how, even at the height of the peace movement in the early 1980s, a much smaller percentage were prepared to break with Nato: CND, for this reason, ducked the issue. The opportunity now presents itself, with the end of the cold war, for a renewed challenge to this link, not in the name of anti-Americanism, but in the name of establishing a more balanced, equal relationship between both sides of the Atlantic.

The challenge of producing a more measured critical assessment of the US is posed most sharply with regard to the Third World, and it is here above all that the irresponsibility of left orthodoxy becomes most obvious. That the US has behaved as an imperial power, in economic and military terms, towards the Third World since 1945 is evident. But a critique that simply makes this point avoids at least three others that are of relevance, if not to people in the First World, then to those in the Third.

The first is that in this respect too the US polity is not a monolith, with all its policies pre-determined: there is some room for political movement within the US, by working with those opposed to what prevailing policy may be. For many movements and parties fighting for democracy and independence in the Third World some positive engagement with the US is essential, be this Congress, the press, the State Department or whatever. Simply to say that these are all imperialists and enemies is to miss the point. One has only to look at what, over many years, a range of Third World movements actually did – the ANC, which got the US Congress to impose the decisive sanctions legislation in 1986, the PLO, which has tried to sustain a dialogue with the US, the Eritreans who have built up a working relationship with the US over the past few years, which served, in part, to secure their recent attainment of de facto independence. The political priority for these and many others is not only to criticise US policy, which they do, but to find a way of engaging positively with it.

Secondly, there is the issue, most sharply posed by the Gulf war, of US intervention. In the face of a series of illegal and imperialistic interventions by US forces over past decades, there has been a tendency for the liberal and left opposition, in Europe and the US, to oppose intervention as such, in all its forms. But this position is questionable, both historically and politically. First of all, there are in this century some striking cases in which the US, imperialist and self-interested as it was, has played a positive role in world politics: Woodrow Wilson's support for national self-determination after the first world war helped bring independence to a range of countries in Europe; the US role in the second world war was of a positive kind. Secondly, there are a number of cases today where more, not less, intervention, in the form of economic and military pressure, is welcomed by the peoples of the countries themselves. Here the Gulf war pointed out the fatal short-sightedness of the Left consensus on both sides of the Atlantic: opposition to the war was based on hostility to 'US interventionism', as if this were a self-sufficient position: it was valid to question whether opposition to Iraqi occupation of another country made war inevitable, but not to argue that because US motives were self-interested, as they certainly were, no international action against Saddam was justified. The issue was posed even more sharply in the aftermath of the war when it became clear that what the peoples of Iraq wanted, and were asking for, was more not less US action, to overthrow the Ba'athist regime and enable them to come to power.

'In the post-1945 context, the greatest source of radical ideas in Europe has been the US'

A third issue, and one of special responsibility for the metropolitan Left, is that of the quality of analysis of US society and politics itself. Faced with the monolithic consensus of the mainstream media and academic output, the opposition has too often tended to resort to conspiracy theory, scandal and moral denunciation. Conspiracy and scandal there certainly are, but in themselves they do not constitute an adequate alternative analysis. What has too often happened is that these facile critiques from the European and US Lefts have fed into the conspiracy theories generated in the Third World itself: instead of providing analysis that is informed, and which enables action, it too often misleads and disables. To say that the US is irrevocably opposed to such and such a people – Palestinians, Greeks or whatever – or to 'Islam', or that all US economic influence impoverishes those it affects, is to do no service to peoples in the Third World. They need a guide not to how unremittingly evil the US is, but to how to deal with it, and get the best out of these deals, be they political or economic.

In this context, a strong measure of blame lies with the US Left itself. Beleaguered, courageous and dogged as it is, it has nonetheless too easily fallen into the mirror-image platitudes, taking what it does not like in the morning's

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issue of *The New York Times* as the basis for its political position. Some critics of US policy make clear that what they are concerned with is not what is happening in Third World countries, for which they are not responsible, but rather the lies and manipulation practised by the US state itself. This is very much the position that underlies Chomsky's sustained and compelling critiques of US foreign policy. But this approach, apparently consistent and defensible, runs a number of dangers.

First, it too easily encourages the view that the whole of world politics is in some way or another a product of US action. It is, in this way, merely nationalism inverted: it does not try to locate the actions of the US government in a broader international context. During the anti-war movement of the early 1980s many of the best critiques of the arms race were produced in the US: but too many wrote as if US arms policy was a product entirely of domestic factors, as if the USSR, and international political processes, did not exist. Similarly, in the critique of US policy in the Gulf, there was too often a tendency to suggest that in some way or another the US was responsible for the whole thing anyway – by having armed Saddam in the past, by having tricked him into invading Kuwait, or by refusing to let him get out when he really wanted to. Other forces did not count: all was the work, and the fault, of the US.

Secondly, a focus solely on the workings and misworkings of US policy can too easily be seen as avoiding the issue of politically evaluating what forces within Third World countries may be doing themselves and of how outside forces can relate to them. If there is torture, oppression, invasion in Third World states, this cannot be dealt with merely by saying that US policy in this context is dishonest. The problem of policy towards Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge period, or of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, is not merely, or indeed mainly, one of US misrepresentation and moral inconsistency, but rather of what these regimes were themselves doing and of how outsiders, including the US, could help the peoples so affected to resist them. To be concerned only with the critique of your own government is a form of inverted patriotism and moral solipsism: it was, as ever, well summarised by a remark of Gore Vidal's during the Gulf war that he was not overly concerned about Saddam since he was no worse than the Los Angeles police department. The LAPD had just been videoed beating up a black suspect; Saddam has murdered tens of thousands of his compatriots.

The need for a more measured political assessment of the US is a matter of great urgency the world over, for two evident reasons. First, the collapse of communism has meant that more and more people the world over look to the US as a model society and as a source of benevolent influence: to counter this delusion involves first recognising the fact that this is the case, something of no little political significance in itself, but also counterposing to it not the platitudes of anti-Americanism but something more informed. If the Left is going to come up with a coherent and plausible assessment of the US, it has to recognise that masses of the world want to go and live there. There is little point in telling the people of Albania, or China, or Mexico, that they are victims of false consciousness. Secondly, the US has today greater diplomatic and strategic power than at any time since the second world war. It is easy to overstate this, but wrong to ignore it: the question posed for people inside the US and those who have to deal with it from without is in what ways, small or large, that influence can be put to better rather than worse use, be this in North-South economic relations, in the field of human rights, in that of intervention or of a new, potentially non-hegemonic security system in Europe.

'The US offers greater opportunity for integration than any society in the stuffy world of Europe'

Those in Europe, and the US, who have long sustained a critique of US society and of US foreign policy would be well-advised to break their often too comfortable and absolute denunciations, and take the opportunities which now present themselves. We may miss the opportunity. The forces within the US and outside which want to enhance the more oppressive and hierarchical character of the world will certainly not.●

Fred Halliday is professor of international relations at the LSE.

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Soul Focus

Isaac Julien's prize-winning film, *Young Soul Rebels*, is released this month. **Lola Young** talks to him about the potential for black cinema in Britain

Isaac Julien is a co-founder of Sankofa Film and Video. His previous work includes *Looking For Langston*

You've been involved in a number of award winning productions. How important is that kind of public critical acclaim to you?

It's important to have some kind of legitimation from the context that you're working in, some kind of cultural recognition. Winning the critics' prize in Cannes was very important because it said something to British critics here. Generally, film criticism in this country is not as sophisticated as it could be, it's still quite marginalised.

It struck me that ten years ago I couldn't have envisaged that a black film-maker from Britain would have been gaining that kind of international acclaim for a home-produced film. You've talked before about the importance of collective work with Sankofa Film and Video, but it seems like the attention is often focused on you.

Young Soul Rebels is, in a way, a collaborative project outside of the collective because it's a more industry-based film. In that sense it's very difficult to bring with you that collective onus because the industry doesn't really function in that way. I think people were rather nervous about giving over vast sums of money to a company like Sankofa. I think it probably would be true to say that we weren't experienced in making budget feature films at this level.

Was that nervousness anything to do with being a black group or is that a generalised sort of feeling from the industry when financing something?

I think when it comes to fiction people have worked consistently against the interests of black writers, black directors, black actors, on the whole, historically. One of the gaps, it seems to me, really falls in the area of drama. There's something about that area of work which people are particularly resistent to. Whereas in documentary or radical journalism you can see a lot of success stories in relationship to British broadcasting. But there are no black script supervisors, there are no black people in positions of authority in the drama departments up and down the country, from British Screen, to the British Film Institute, to Channel 4. I think there's a lot of ignorance around black experiences in those spaces.

Some of that's to do with people's work being categorised – 'Oh well he's a black film-maker, he must have something revolutionary and political to say'. Do you need to resist that in your work?

I think in our own work, if I talk specifically about *Looking For Langston*, there's an attempt to move away from overtly political statements towards the specifity of black gay male desire. Or in Maureen Blackwood's *Perfect Image* to do with the role of black women's identity. So they weren't political with a capital P, they dealt with subjectivity, and I think this area of work is very important in relationship to black film-makers translating black identities from being objects to subjects. It's that kind of story which is not so interesting for commissioning editors, because invariably they don't involve white people in them. I think that's a problem really because I think there can be very interesting work, as Charles Burnett's films like *To Sleep With Anger* have shown. Even with the films of Spike Lee, it's that kind of race relations type narrative that people are more interested in. But then, having said that, people could accuse *Young Soul Rebels* of being precisely that.

You mentioned Spike Lee, and there was this whole thing at Cannes, like 'Here's Isaac Julien, Britain's answer to Spike Lee'. Did you feel that you were part of a group of black film-makers, a caucus if you like in that particular situation?

Spike Lee was, unsurprisingly, very supportive in that context. I think there was a general comradely kind of air, and Spike was glad not to be the only black film-maker there. But as to 'Britain's answer to Spike Lee', before Spike Lee made films he was compared to Woody Allen, he was the black Woody Allen. I think anybody who comes up in a similar space...

Black and male...

... Black and male, is going to be asked that kind of question. The answer is that our contexts are completely different. I think our politics are completely different and I think I'm rather happy to say that I would disappoint lots of people trying to pigeonhole me into that kind of space.

At the beginning of *Young Soul Rebels* I was in seventh heaven because of P. Funk, one of my all time favourite bands, and the music felt quite dominant to me. I think it was Toni Morrison who said that music should always be a cultural referent for black people in whatever sphere of cultural production they're engaged in. Do you feel that's something that is very important?

I think if one wants to look to the beginnings of any discourse around black sexuality, one would have to look to music. The blues, R and B,

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Photography: Chris Clunn

they're the places where those discourses are first attempted and debated. In the case specifically of *Young Soul Rebels*, in 1977 an audio contract was made in the diaspora, between America and the Caribbean and Britain, and it was through music, and the technology of music that we've been able to speak to each other. In terms of the formation of a black identity, the 70s was always looked at through this tunnel vision, that black culture was reggae music, and the more hybrid influence of soul boys and soul girls, white and black, demonstrated the kind of community that was slightly neglected. *Young Soul Rebels* is an attempt to shed more light on that.

You could say, at the end of the 80s, that youth culture and black culture are almost synonymous. In 1977 one could only listen to maybe a few hours of soul music on the radio, and in 1991 there's Kiss FM.

Do you see *Young Soul Rebels* as a definite break with the more 'experimental' work that you've been involved in before?

I see it as a continuation of a number of questions that I've been interested in – questions of national identity, questions of sexuality, of gender. Obviously the main difference is the form. *Young Soul Rebels* looks the way it does because it's the first time I'd been given a certain amount of money, but the form was also dictated by the kind of political questions I was interested in, and the audiences that I wanted to address those questions to.

What is expected of audiences, and what audiences may expect of the films, is interesting, particularly when people invoke the 'black community' and what they might want from a film. And of course, some of the controversy which has been around films like *Looking For Langston* has been due to various people saying, well, the black community doesn't want this kind of film...

You could say the black community isn't very different from any other community, in the sense that it doesn't really want to deal with questions of transgression. There are certain questions that different communities on the whole don't want to deal with. So some communities within the black community – because I don't see them as a homogeneous mass in the same way that advertising or marketing people might – won't like some of the subject matter that I'm dealing with in *Young Soul Rebels*. In that sense I'm interested in questioning audiences' assumptions. I don't see myself just as a black film-maker. What I'm trying to do is seduce people, seduce them into the questions that I want them to deal with.

If the black community says that it wants *Desmond's* or *The Cosby Show*, if they want those kind of programmes, they're there, and they will certainly be there this summer. There's going to be lots of realist American black films with lots of people being shot, lots of violence, lots of violence being done to women, lots of homophobic statements, which I'm sure the black community is going to enjoy. I think that says a lot about what the 'black community' desires, whatever this black community is that people want to construct.

The issue of sexual politics as a whole in the film is obviously very strong, and what's interesting for me is that it goes across race and across class and so on. But some of the characters seem to be your sort of stock stereotypical characters particularly in terms of the police officers, the skinheads. And also the principal women characters seemed quite smallish, and the girlfriend Tracy seemed to be very much a girlfriend, rather than an individual in her own right...

I think it's true. On the whole the film is about an exploration of black masculinity and that's been a project that I've been interested in, and it's a project that I think feminists should be interested in too, as well as the black community and the gay community. I always feel that these questions of black masculinity are slightly deprioritised in an attempt to readdress a 'hierarchy' of difference – they go in a kind of order, like women, blacks, lesbians and gays, disabled. *Young Soul Rebels* is about the exploration of those masculinities and I suppose those things are prioritised in the film.

The trouble is, a black film comes out and everybody wants it to be everything for them, and it's really hard, as you say, to even try to live up to all of those things.

In some ways, the only answer is that there needs to be a much more pluralistic attempt to deal with these questions, in fiction.

And it really means as well, more black people involved in the industry generally, so that you don't become the sole representative or authority.

It's a fiction to talk about me as a sole representative, because there is a whole movement of independent black film-makers in this country, but their positions are marginalised within the institutional structure, in terms of finance to make the kind of movies that they want to make. This question of the burden of representation has to be faced politically square on.

There's been a lot of innovation, excitement and development taking place in black independent film. With the current recession and the lack of interest in black people who want to make films about different kinds of things, it's difficult to be positive. What do you feel is the future for black film-makers in Britain?

I think it's bleak, to be honest. Culturally, potentially, it's phenomenally interesting and at the cutting edge. No doubt about it, it has been for several years now. But the institutional response is lacking. People feel that they did their black films in the 80s – feminist women in the 70s, blacks in the 80s, and there are some kind of concessions to gay/lesbian culture in the 90s, in terms of broadcasting. But we've only begun to look at these questions really, and it's into the 90s that we need serious financing for what we're doing. At the moment there are no spaces really.●

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Concrete Bungle

Pastiche of the old, or crass of the new?
Stephanie Williams on the architectural debate

Early in June it was let slip to a select group of journalists that plans to cloak the Hayward Gallery, the Purcell Room and the Queen Elizabeth Hall at the South Bank in a set of new, rather more marketable clothes, were not shaping up as profitably as hoped. It was announced that they are to be demolished and new, more efficient replacements erected: a new Purcell Room at the rear of the Festival Hall, a new Hayward and Queen Elizabeth Hall on the site of the car park in front of the Shell Centre.

Like Paternoster Square, that other classic example of postwar town planning, it is the South Bank's turn for radical architectural overhaul. Predictably, the architectural debate is heating up nicely. But this time the tables have been turned. Whereas at Paternoster the modernist camp was generally seduced into endorsing demolition, by becoming engaged – at least initially – in plans to redevelop the site, many of those who are fiercest in defence of progress and change are now calling for preservation.

This is excellent. For by thus turning the architectural debate on its head, it may at last be possible to resolve it. By now even the public has grasped that the argument is about nothing more than style. Do you like things old or do you like them new? But when you start to take the case of the South Bank apart there are enough ingredients to make quite a few people start to feel uncomfortable.

Normally, for example, the modernists would not hesitate to tear the buildings down. But two things have happened. First, they have lost their confidence that any new building erected in Britain today is bound to be an improvement on what already exists. Second, they remember the high ideals behind the design, the tremendous social aspirations it represented, and the enormous political and cultural energies that were harnessed in trying to create the South Bank.

Now that Paternoster Square is going, the complex stands as the only area of postwar comprehensive town planning in central London, the last remains of a vision of what London might have been. Yet are these sufficient reasons to keep the buildings?

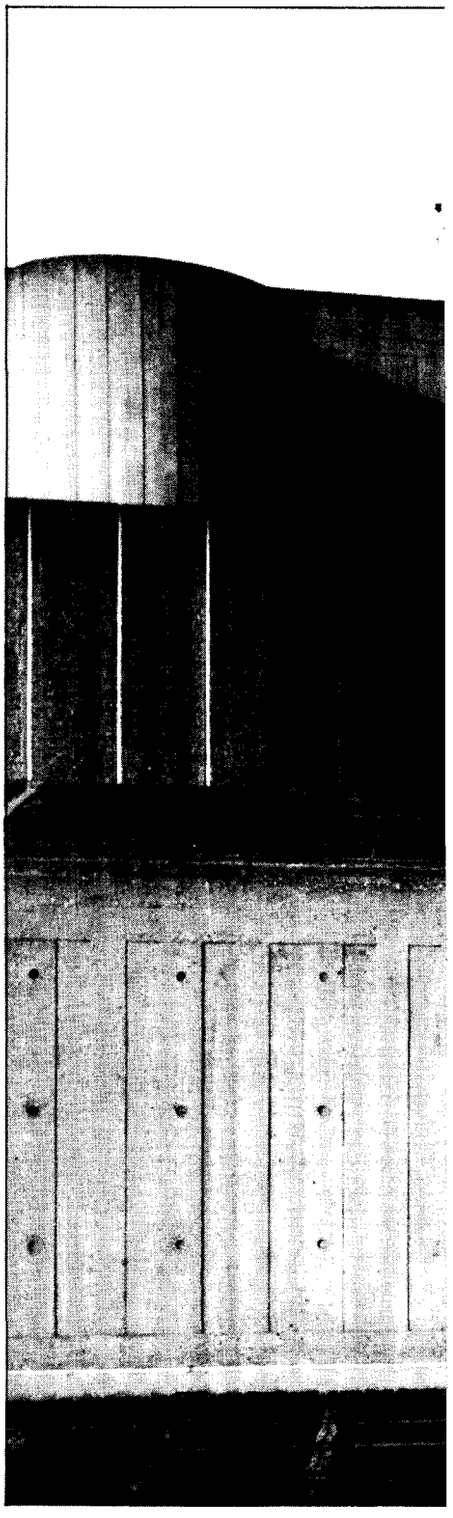
However painstakingly conceived, in 1953, the complete plans for the South Bank were subject to constant compromise and have never been fully realised. The monolithic scale of the Shell Centre (whose tower incidentally daily improves with age) was unpredicted. The walkway system which was to have linked directly into Waterloo, was never completed. Plans for an opera house were scrapped, and the National Theatre moved from next door to County Hall to its present site. The architects on the job argued repeatedly for restaurants and shops to be included on the site, but the LCC, its owners, were only prepared to fund cultural amenities. At least three of the architects who worked on the Hayward and the Queen Elizabeth Hall – Ron Herron, Dennis Crompton and Warren Shaw – went on with Peter Cook to found Archigram, a movement whose ideas were to have significant influence on a whole generation of architects around the world. It is entirely possible to argue that these buildings on the South Bank are as significant a relic of British history as Hampton Court and therefore ought to be saved. Unfortunately, for many, they are also the cultural equivalent of Broadwater Farm.

This is why fierce debate over the South Bank is so valuable. We know that these buildings are disturbing and ugly. We also know that from the beginning the Hayward and the Queen Elizabeth Hall have never been loved, even by those critics who wanted to. Here is Sir Nikolaus Pevsner: 'It is a thrilling experience if the weather is fine and you are at leisure. But what if you are late, what if you find steps a strain?' He likes the bleakness of the concrete and the intricacies of the walkways to Prianesi's 'Carceri'. Christopher Booker went further: 'The chief architectural inspiration for the pile of concrete blocks on the South Bank appears to have been a cross between Speer's Atlantic Wall and the *Führerbunker*'. A good building may be difficult to understand, but it should, at the very least, give you satisfaction. A really good building defies history. It is very rare for fine architecture to be villified in its own time.

So let's concentrate on a new argument. Every time the public is confronted with plans for new development it has no choice but to react. Is it not time to go on the offensive? To think in advance about the kind of buildings we *really* want to see going up in Britain today? The kind of heritage we *really* want to keep and the kinds of places we want our cities to be? Are we to continue to take refuge in 18th century pastiche (shortly to be seen at Paternoster) or recreations of Venice (London Bridge City) because we don't have the resources to argue for better? Or have we really lost the nerve to accept architecture inspired by our own time? Ironically, if the traditions of the planning system hold true on the South Bank, the argument will inevitably be raised that whatever is designed must 'relate' to the Royal National Theatre (itself conceived to marry with the Hayward et al) and the Shell Centre (the commercial element which helped finance the offending group in the first place).

Could the South Bank be the test case which finally helps to resolve the architectural debate in this country, which demonstrates that there is a middle way between the pastiche of the old and the crass of new? That life is sharpened by contrast, that not only can the radically new live alongside the old, but enhance it? That what is important is not what kind of style a building is, but whether it works where it is placed, and whether it has integrity?

As for reality: will it get built? Conservatively it will cost at *least* £150m to



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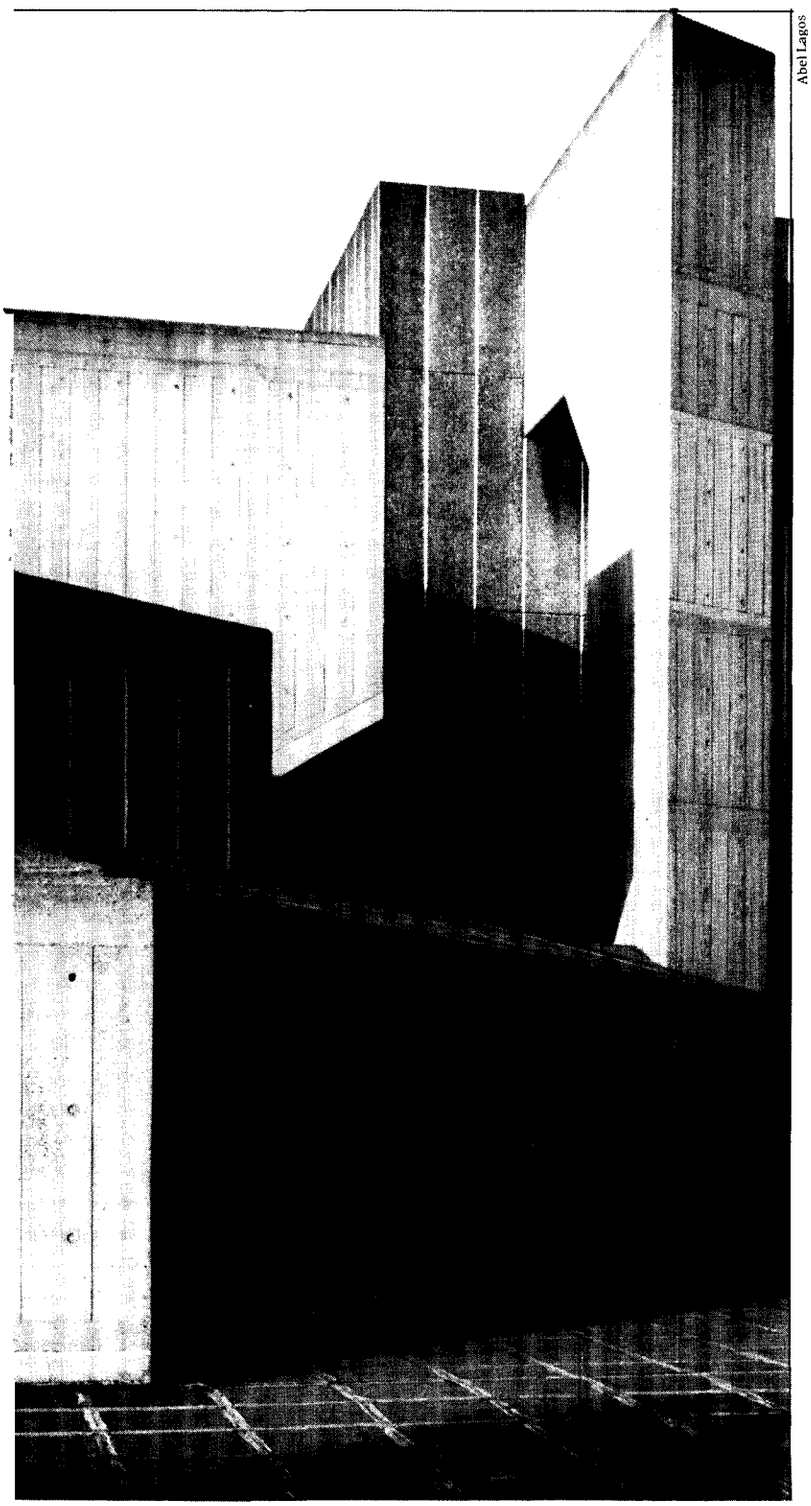

Abel Lagos

replace the Hayward and the two concert halls. What about a possible public inquiry? We do not know what the plans for the new buildings will look like. Masterplanner Terry Farrell talks of bringing in several different architects to do various buildings. There is to be a range of different designs, and a variety of uses. 'Let's get people on to the South Bank.' An age old cry. The South Bank is a classic case of how too many fingers can spoil a pie. Don't let it happen again.●

Trevor Johnston on the road to new Europe

High Hopes

Edging out highly-fancied opposition, including Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano De Bergerac* and Xhang Yimou's *Ju-Dou*, Xavier Koller's official Swiss entry *Journey Of Hope* surprised just about everyone except the voting members when the film picked up the Best Foreign Film statuette at this year's Hollywood Oscars. Inspired by an incident in late 1988, the film recreates the misfortunes of a party of Turkish immigrants illegally attempting to enter Switzerland; losing their way amid the mountainous terrain around the Italian border, freezing conditions as night closed in were to take their toll in the death of a young boy from exhaustion and frostbite.

Given such an outline and the recognition of the Academy, one might expect the sort of patronising schmaltz that never ceases to affect the American tear ducts. Yet it's to Koller's credit that the piece never quite makes it down that well-travelled avenue. In its documentation of the experience of transit and the responses it hopes to provoke in the audience, *Journey Of Hope* instead offers a valuable cinematic contribution to discussion surrounding the ever more urgent issue of the increasing wave of human migration towards the attractive economic climate of western Europe.

'The dramatic concept of the film,' explains Koller, 'was not to give arguments but to offer an experience. At the start of the film, I wanted to let the audience get to know the family just a little bit. I didn't want to give them an excuse for sympathy because they're poor. However, as they get further away from the country and the culture that they know, they increasingly have to rely on other people to make their decisions for them. In a sense they do become objects to be pushed around.'

My instant reaction to *Journey Of Hope* had been that Koller had failed in the early, Turkish-set section of the film to provide an adequate characterisation for the central family. One's sympathies, I felt, were barely engaged because the three seemed mere cyphers in the first place. I hardly realised the point that we simply don't get to know people in transit in this way; although they might appear to be mere human freight, this doesn't stop them from still being human beings. There's probably a similar process going on each time we pass a homeless person in the street. We think of statistics, a network of social problems, and somewhere along the line lose sight of the human being staring back at us.

Impressively, in *Journey Of Hope* Koller finds a way to make it clear that by seeing the human detritus of European migration as mere detritus, it is we in the sophisticated Western societies who are losing a part of our humanity in the process. Koller introduces a German truck driver, Ramser, who takes the family from Naples to the Swiss-Italian border, and along the way bridges the communication gap to enjoy some moments of companionship. He acts as something of a surrogate for the European audience for which the film was

intended, and, surprisingly perhaps, also returns in the film's final scene, which takes place after Haydar has lost his son in the snows and faces inevitable deportation. An antiseptic Swiss police cell resonates with genuine compassion as the two men face each other. 'I would've liked to have been your friend,' reflects Haydar.

'Haydar's offer at the end of the movie', explains Koller, 'is the journey of hope that starts in the future for us. There are two journeys of hope, really, because the title of the film has a different meaning at the start – where it obviously refers to the family's trek across Europe – and now at the close. It's still an optimistic point of view, although people only see the suffering and say how depressing the ending is. You really have to come to terms with Haydar's offer and what that means for us.'●

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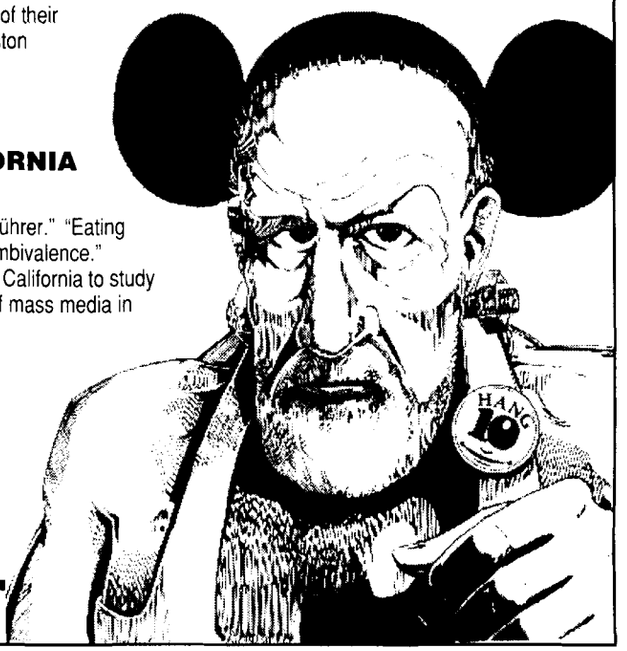

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Male To Measure

There's a new wave of interest in what makes men tick. **Andy Medhurst** sets off in hot pursuit of the real man

If the recent boom in sexual political studies of masculinity has taught us anything, it's that it is no longer possible to see the traditional, heterosexual male as the unproblematic norm against which all other sexual identities are measured. The 'real man' is not some state of innate being, serenely stiff-upper-lipped and beyond questioning, but a set of social codes and sexual ideologies that has to be *learned* – not consciously perhaps, but rather absorbed from a whole range of historical, political and cultural images.

Joseph Bristow's **Empire Boys** (*Harper Collins hbk £27, pbk £10.95*) is an exceptionally sharp and perceptive dissection of a body of fiction whose influence in the construction of white, British masculinity has been enormous. In his own words, the book is a 'cultural history of imperialist boyhood and manhood', which means that he applies a critical intelligence familiar with both literary theory and feminist and gay sexual politics to novels such as *Treasure Island, King Solomon's Mines* and *Tarzan Of The Apes*. Bristow is not interested in facile condemnations of the politics of these texts; instead he situates them, with considerable wit and skill, as part of wider discourses concerned with the Victorian imperialist project and the consequent constructions of race and gender on which that whole enterprise depended.

He also looks at the 19th-century schoolboy story, unravelling the anxious undercurrents of homo-eroticism that such fictions simultaneously forbade as unspeakable vice, and celebrated as the noblest form of pure comradeship. This 'purity' depended above all on the absence of women, since throughout the texts studied by Bristow, femininity is a constantly troubling 'other'.

The period covered by Bristow was, arguably, the last one in which the novel was the dominant form of popular fiction. That role was taken over by the cinema, a form just as desperately concerned to promulgate certain versions of sexual identity. The added dimension of the visual – of actually *seeing* the masculine and feminine ideals rather than simply reading about them – made questions of desire and desirability inescapable, raising problems in the representation of masculinity. To put it crudely, how do you get male audiences to admire male stars without fancying them as well?

Such issues acquire an extra layer of complexity if the male stars concerned do not comply with the rigid definitions of what is acceptably masculine, as was the case in the 1950s with Montgomery Clift, James Dean and Marlon Brando. These three are the subject of Graham McCann's study **Rebel Males** (*Hamish Hamilton hbk £15.99*), and their intrinsic interest as flawed icons, unresolved amalgams of toughness and sensitivity, means that this book cannot fail to intrigue.

McCann's methodology, however, is another matter. It's a curious book, stranded halfway between an academic study (plenty of footnotes, slightly ostentatiously well-read quotes from the likes of Baudelaire, Camus and Walter Benjamin) and coffee-table survey – after all, the three stars concerned aren't just culturally important, but also eminently sellable to crazy mixed-up poster-buyers. This uneasy blend of styles and aims leaves the book full of useful insights, but ultimately unfocused. And it's odd, to say the least, to find a socio-biography of Hollywood stars that makes no reference to or acknowledgement of Richard Dyer's pioneering work in this area – particularly when so much of McCann's analysis reads like a clever undergraduate's parody of Dyer's approach.

Manful Assertions: Masculinity In Britain Since 1800, edited by Michael Roper and John Tosh (*Routledge, hbk £30.00, pbk £9.99*) approaches the question of male identities from a different and daring perspective. The discipline of history, even by the usual dismal standards of academia, is grotesquely over-populated by patriarchs of one kind or another. Feminist history has, undeniably, redrawn the map of how we think about the past, but its impact has been primarily on non-specialists (ie, on real people); historians are still more likely to have beards than any of their colleagues. There are, of course, significant exceptions to this caricature, and none more significant than the contributors to History Workshop, where most of the pieces in *Manful Assertions* originated.

The contributors to this volume take such unpromising raw material as the Salvation Army, or the life of Thomas Carlyle, and uncover the half-hidden but crucial ideas about masculinity that flourished there. There is a certain amount of overlap with Bristow here, with chapters on boys' magazine fiction in the 1920s and 30s and on the tensions of imperialism, heroism and sexuality embodied by the figure of Lawrence of Arabia. The most immediate, impressive and (how encouragingly unusual for a male historian) *moving* essay is by Peter M Lewis, who autobiographically traces the relentless building up of his own masculinity in a succession of patriarchal, class-bound, emotionally barren institutions: prep school, boarding school, university, armed forces.

It's an angry, saddened indictment, but its clarity and political shrewdness save it from bitterness and pointless recrimination. Like Bristow's book, it shows how the best cultural analysis is rooted in the bringing together of sophisticated critical thinking with an empowering, urgent sense of personal involvement: these constructions of masculinity still matter, still need to be interrogated and overturned, because they continue to limit and damage the ways in which we as men today can conceive of living our lives.●

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Dirty Reading

Chris Savage King welcomes us to the pleasure tome, and provides a classic guide

The New Age and the new moralism it has spawned overlooks our baser urges, yet secret lives and desires still flourish under bland exteriors. When summer comes people idle in parks and on beaches hoping someone will appear, or read outside while contemplating what they might get up to later. The gentler pleasures thread the air and ease the path to seduction.

Occasions like this need something extra to provide a definite charge. Few will admit that their favourite resource is a really good dirty book. The recent intense porn debates have driven this amusement into hiding, porn being almost the only issue left stressing ethics over aesthetics. Yet possibly due to increased hesitation in light of the real thing, fantasy sex n' violence has become fashionable again as entertainment.

Lesbian photographer Della Grace caused a predictable stir with her gorgeous and liberating images in *Love Bites* (GMP). But they stand ably alongside the late Robert Mapplethorpe's work, swapping raucous dykey womanish fun for androgynous sublimity. With post-feminism having pledged women's right to be as bad as men, it's difficult to judge where porn ends and erotica begins. If hard core wins hands down over softcore in wooing the voracious id, hard core had better be produced by those best placed to take up the challenge – on the margins.

High Risk (Serpent's Tail), out this month, hopes to crash these barriers – offering stories, autobiographical fragments and poems on the 'forbidden zones of sex'. Written under the black cloud of Aids and the loathsome Moral Majority, it works on a 'we've-come-this-far-so-why-stop-now' principle. While there is much that's analytical, didactic, downright brutal and... maybe *impressionistic* is the kindest term, there's almost nothing that qualifies as basic turn-on material. This is a blight of the 80s hyperextended self-consciousness – writers are too busy examining everything to just get on with it. Sex n' death, sex n' drugs, it's all very ably *discussed* – as avant garde porn it's just written in the right way about the wrong sorts of things: *issues*!

Yet mainstream porn, undetained by such matters, is inadequate for a number of reasons, mainly because it's harshly and vindictively rooted in convention. Aimed at the most unpromising audience of conservative, breast-beating males, it's invested with stagnant values that apart from providing no joy, deliver and affirm 'truths' all too familiar to women who have to deal with stupid men at any level. It's just boiled down naturalism, its rabidness only emphasises its morbid loathing and disgust.

By contrast, porn with an eye to the exotic will lift readers into a different realm – transcending work ethics, likely events, and physical limitations. Participants live and thrive solely for pleasure. They break or ignore, rather than uphold, existing social barriers. Choices are laid out ready for the taking, paradise is glimpsed. It is ingenious quite beyond the boorish and routine claims of reader's letters.

Nabokov has referred to a category of 'aphrodisiac' fiction, noting that the term 'offensive' is often confused with 'unusual'. Oscar Wilde claimed that an art work is either interesting or dull: porn has thrown up its own range of unusual and interesting classics.

The frequency with which *The Story Of O* and *120 Days Of Sodom* appear on bookshelves suggests that many people's curiosity has prompted diligent research. Both contain the hallmarks of first class arousal material: unbelievable acts described in the most epicurean detail.

S/M is of course highly apt fantasy material – involving the maximum of physical sensation delivered with the utmost formality, and a voluptuous attention to the responses of the victim which amounts to a form of tenderness. So unlikely in its regenerative powers, it pretends to be nothing but lies, and has as much connection to real oppression as funfair rides have to road accidents. The Marquis' love of pontification makes him stodgy at times, very few can manage the last violent section without feeling physically sick.

Just out is another long-winded opus – *Juliette* (Arrow). Go in to any bookshop and someone's thumbing it because it just happens to be there. *The Story Of O* is a more delicate affair, but devotees should avoid its successor – *The New Story Of O*. With its dubious authorship, ham-fisted plot, and sub-Spillane style prose, it has none of the existential mystique that entranced so many pseuds, or provided the rest of us with an excuse for its perusal. Fans would be better off with Pat Califia's *Macho Sluts* (Alyson) – rich on lavish detail, filthy, well plotted and incisive in local observations. For aficionados, *Venus In Furs* (Blast Books) is probably worth a look, but with more frenzied anticipation than action, it's for hardened masochists only.

S/M of course was the governing tone of most Victorian porn, and in corners of shops featuring Xaviera Hollander's correspondence and various Anons in fluorescent nighties, lie a few treasures: *The Oyster I-III* and *The Pearl I-III* (NEL). Written in, or pastiching an age when men had total legal impunity there is a chivalrous delightfully improbable, interest and effort aimed at female ecstasy. Containing huge casts of blushing young men and *soigné* Madame de Merteuil types, there's an equality between participants piercing hidden mysteries which instills breathless awe and utter dedication. The sophistication and variation in acts will please the most jaded palates, and the heated precision of the explicit, though quaintly lyrical prose manages to recall the most sensational gist of the best real-life sexual adventures, while not reminding you of the mundanities of most.

The 60s, despite all its talk, did not produce much of interest – ugly folk getting it on under strobe lights, garrulous obscenity – seediness bleached of the drama and insight that makes such things alluring. This was also the age that ushered in the dire sex manual – Neanderthal men with miniscule pricks posing with sad looking women. Whether snickering or severe in tone, all stated the obvious in earnest and uttered the deadly dic-

Illustration: Julia Powell

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tum that sexual prowess was a social duty. Marco Vassi's *The Erotic Comedies* (Black Spring Press), published in 81, is probably the best porn owing anything to 60s lore. Containing sci-fi elements and a dash of political humour, its splattery comic book excess helps theatricalise a milieu which is not so much gay in orientation as blissfully indiscriminate.

Of course, 'real' writers of 'proper' novels might be expected to be good on sex, but porn is a contrived art, quite ruined by any trace of sincerity. Even when the subject of a work is a sexual odyssey (Genet, Nestle, Miller etc) the frankness and honesty of such accounts, including salty observations on futility, is at odds with the delirious excess required by single-minded readers. Erica Jong might be credited with the invention of the 'zipless fuck' when the English woman's novel was still stuck on the wistful disenchantments of housewives. *Fear Of Flying* (Grafton) offered a selection of breezy encounters, but her preoccupations ever since have become more dull and psychological. Modern girls are probably better off with Rita Mae Brown (*Rubyfruit Jungle*'s still the best), Molly Parkin's colourful backlist or Jane DeLynn's *Don Juan In The Village* (Serpent's Tail) – hysterically witty.

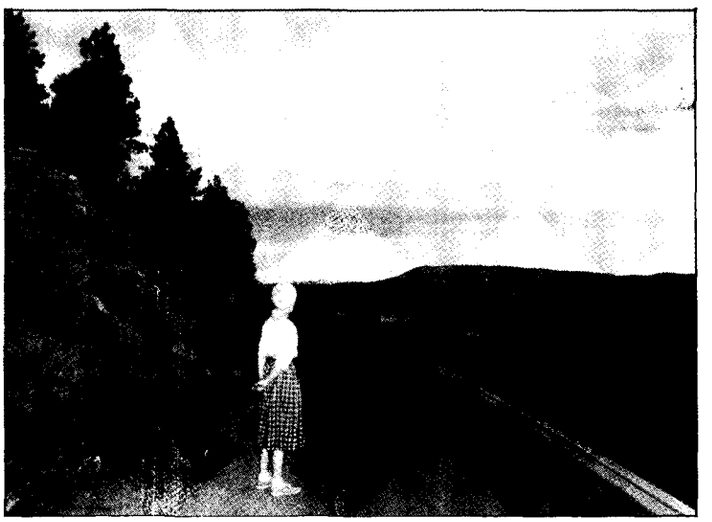
Of the more brusque works, Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden* (Quartet) – sexual fantasies – is economical. John Rechy's account of pick-ups in *The Sexual Outlaw* (Grove) is to the point, if exhausting. John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (Penguin) has a restless charm – the period tang of the prose helps the reader's passage to nirvana.

A further category is porn written by practised hands in other fields. Outstanding in this category is Apollinaire's *Les Onze Milles Verges* (Peter Owen). Brief and exquisite, there's a frantic scene on every page, the odd poetic flourish, and the players are courteously differentiated. Anais Nin, *Delta Of Venus*, *Little Birds*, (Star) is a writer of fragrance: the haunting viola of the pornographic orchestra. She specialises in atmospherics and ritual weirdness – probably the nearest we've got to 'feminine' porn which isn't downright soppy.

In *High Risk* Anne Rice says pornography is a place to visit, not to live. An hour or so with a good bit of stuff will usually fulfil to satiety. Whether as a prelude to sex or self-abuse it's a glorious trip – to a place filled with perverts who confirm and decorate all the wicked thoughts you've ever had. Fantasies that spark orgiastic action need to issue from the head, but the above works should provide much fuel for parched imaginations.●

Cherry Smyth on the enigmatic girl next door

Cindy Dolls



'If one is bold enough to attempt an interpretation, one soon finds oneself on tricky ground,' writes Carla Schulz-Hoffman in her insightful essay in the catalogue on the bizarre, compelling work of artist Cindy Sherman that will be on show this month at the Whitechapel Gallery, London. Beginning with a delayed action shutter release in 1977, Sherman took black and white 'Untitled Film Stills' of herself in a range of wigs, outfits and poses, evoking unseen films of many genres. From gauche home Super 8 to sleazy B-movie, Sherman takes the sexy, frumpy, sluttish female stereotypes, hyper-objectifies them and injects them with a wistfulness and strange sense of alienation. Almost all the subjects are single in the frame, few address the camera and almost never smile, developing the sense of 'unknowingness' they exude.

In one, a woman emerges through a patio door, fingering her suspender belt, caught in a moment of involuntary exposure, which is both mundane and faintly erotic. In another, a young woman waits in a dusk landscape, appearing almost disembodied in her motionless determination to escape. Each image cunningly entices us to supply the narrative around the freeze frame, yet offers nothing more than what we've already culled from a million screen moments.

Moving into high contrast colour in 1980, Sherman's images blossom from low-key dissatisfaction to claustrophobic anxiety. She treats a dead woman's body with the same chilled detachment we later saw in McNaughton's *Henry, Portrait Of A Serial Killer* and Lynch's washed-up Laura. As *Twin Peaks* sought to redeem the all-American girl, so Sherman's work reassures that, beneath the grotesque, lies the integral, unthreatening little *blonde girl. And is Sherman* blonde? There are no 'real' self-portraits to act as a control test, to stabilise the off-kilter images of women on the edge of pain, of adolescent trauma, of post-Cindy-doll loneliness.

But there is the artist. Unlike Diane Arbus's work, where reality was a little too ugly for many, Sherman is the perfect postmodern answer to socio-sexual malaise. We can look at it, but it won't bite. As the props and protheses grow more inhuman, more ludicrous, Sherman delights in taking herself beyond recognition, and at that moment takes the photograph. Is this persistent re-enactment, as Freudians would suggest, teasing the uncanny out of the mundane, to push back a fear of aging and death?

In 1989 her work began to pastiche society portraits of grand masters, from Rembrandt to Caravaggio. While skilful and witty, they are somehow less engaging than her earlier work, perhaps because the element of being a voyeur on half-told stories is removed. Her latest work, no longer self-portraiture, uses dolls and toys as subjects, revealing perhaps the failure of the endless repetition of multiple selves to transcend loss.●

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Thrilled By Theories

Despite dreary textbooks and baffling lessons, science fascinates us. **John Durant** on a popular phenomenon.

It is a myth that science is only for scientists. Public opinion surveys consistently report high levels of public interest in science, and the success of programmes like *Tomorrow's World*, books like *A Brief History Of Time* and magazines like *New Scientist* simply confirm these findings.

In fact: for the past two decades *Tomorrow's World* has commanded audiences that compare well with chart-topping soaps and *Top Of The Pops*; Stephen Hawking's book *A Brief History Of Time* is in the top ten of best-selling works in English published during the 1980s; *New Scientist* is a runaway success, with weekly sales now topping 100,000; and over the past ten years there has been a boom in attendances at science museums and interactive or 'hands on' science centres around Britain. I work in the Science Museum in London, and regularly confront the popularity of science in crowded galleries such as 'Launchpad' and 'Space'.

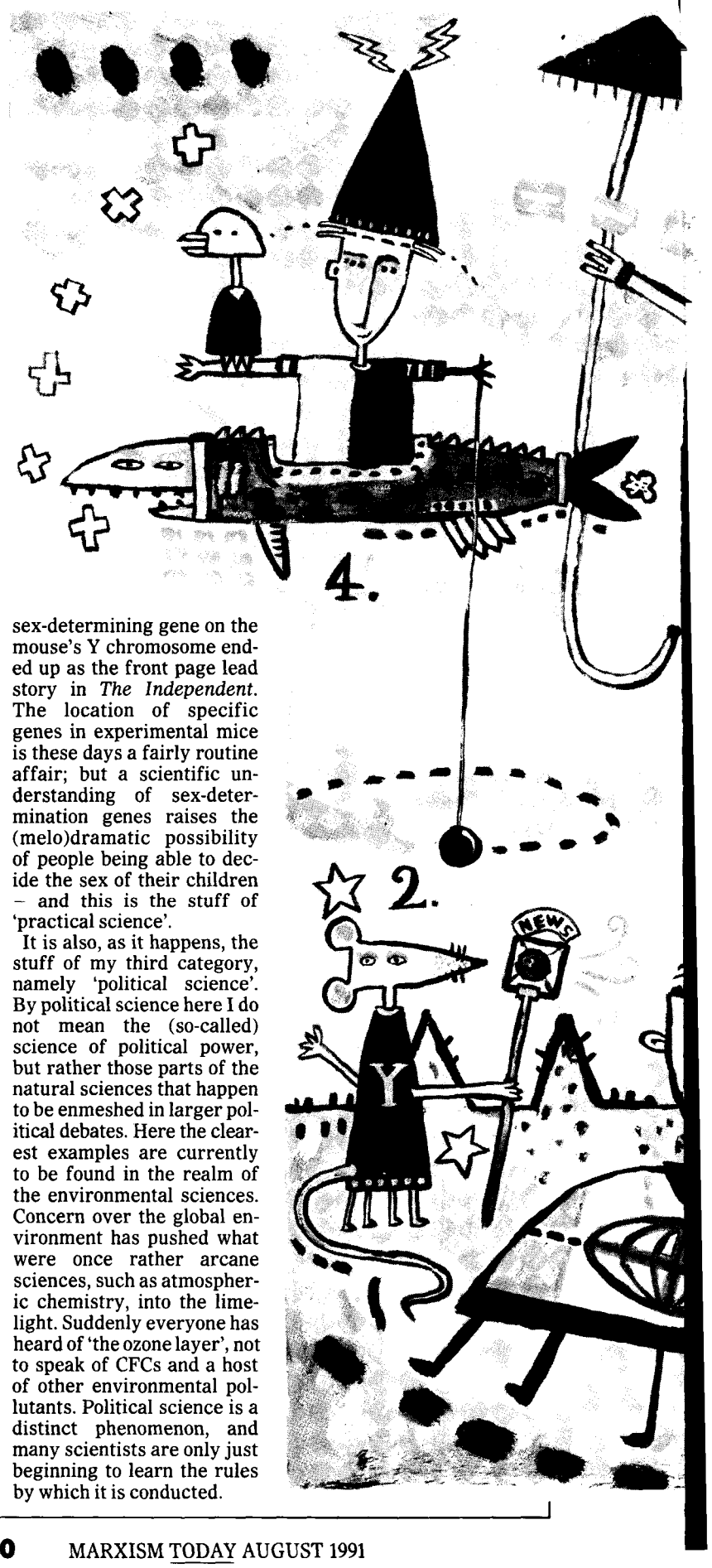
If you are surprised by the phenomenon of popular science, it is probably because you have an image of science that is based largely on your own experience at school. School science has never been particularly popular, either among school-children or among the general public. School textbooks are introductions to large bodies of well-established fact and theory, and generally speaking they make dull reading. Practical classes are inspired by high ideals of learning by doing, but in reality they often become exercises in disappointment and frustration. Together, textbook instruction and practical work are not a recipe for irresistible popular appeal.

The first thing to get straight about popular science is that it is a phenomenon in its own right. Just as school science is not merely 'watered down' research science, so too popular science is not merely watered-down school science but rather something altogether different. School science is a kind of Cook's Tour of the most secure formal knowledge contained within the main natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, etc). Popular science ignores most of this formal knowledge altogether, and instead concentrates public attention on just a few kinds of (mostly extraordinary) science.

At least four different types of popular science can be recognised. First, there is 'philosophical science'. This is science that deals with very large questions, such as where the universe came from, where human beings came from, and where the universe is going. Only a comparatively small number of scientists work on questions as grand as these, but their achievements – and even their difficulties – are regularly trumpeted in public. The extraordinary success of Hawking's *A Brief History Of Time* is partly accounted for by the fact that it deals with the history of the universe (other factors include Hawking's renown as the co-inventor of 'black holes', and the fact of his severe physical disablement). Further examples from the same literary genre include Richard Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker*, and the winner of this year's Science Book Prize, Stephen Jay Gould's *Wonderful Life*.

Second, there is what I shall term 'practical science'. This type of science is associated with a compelling new technology of some sort – a new domestic product such as a satellite tv, perhaps; or a new medical application such as a potential cure for Alzheimer's Disease, or a new way of treating infertility. Any science that lends itself to dramatic everyday applications of this sort is potentially a subject for popular science. This, surely, is why the recent discovery of the sex-determining gene on the mouse's Y chromosome ended up as the front page lead story in *The Independent*. The location of specific genes in experimental mice is these days a fairly routine affair; but a scientific understanding of sex-determination genes raises the (melo)dramatic possibility of people being able to decide the sex of their children – and this is the stuff of 'practical science'.

It is also, as it happens, the stuff of my third category, namely 'political science'. By political science here I do not mean the (so-called) science of political power, but rather those parts of the natural sciences that happen to be enmeshed in larger political debates. Here the clearest examples are currently to be found in the realm of the environmental sciences. Concern over the global environment has pushed what were once rather arcane sciences, such as atmospheric chemistry, into the limelight. Suddenly everyone has heard of 'the ozone layer', not to speak of CFCs and a host of other environmental pollutants. Political science is a distinct phenomenon, and many scientists are only just beginning to learn the rules by which it is conducted.



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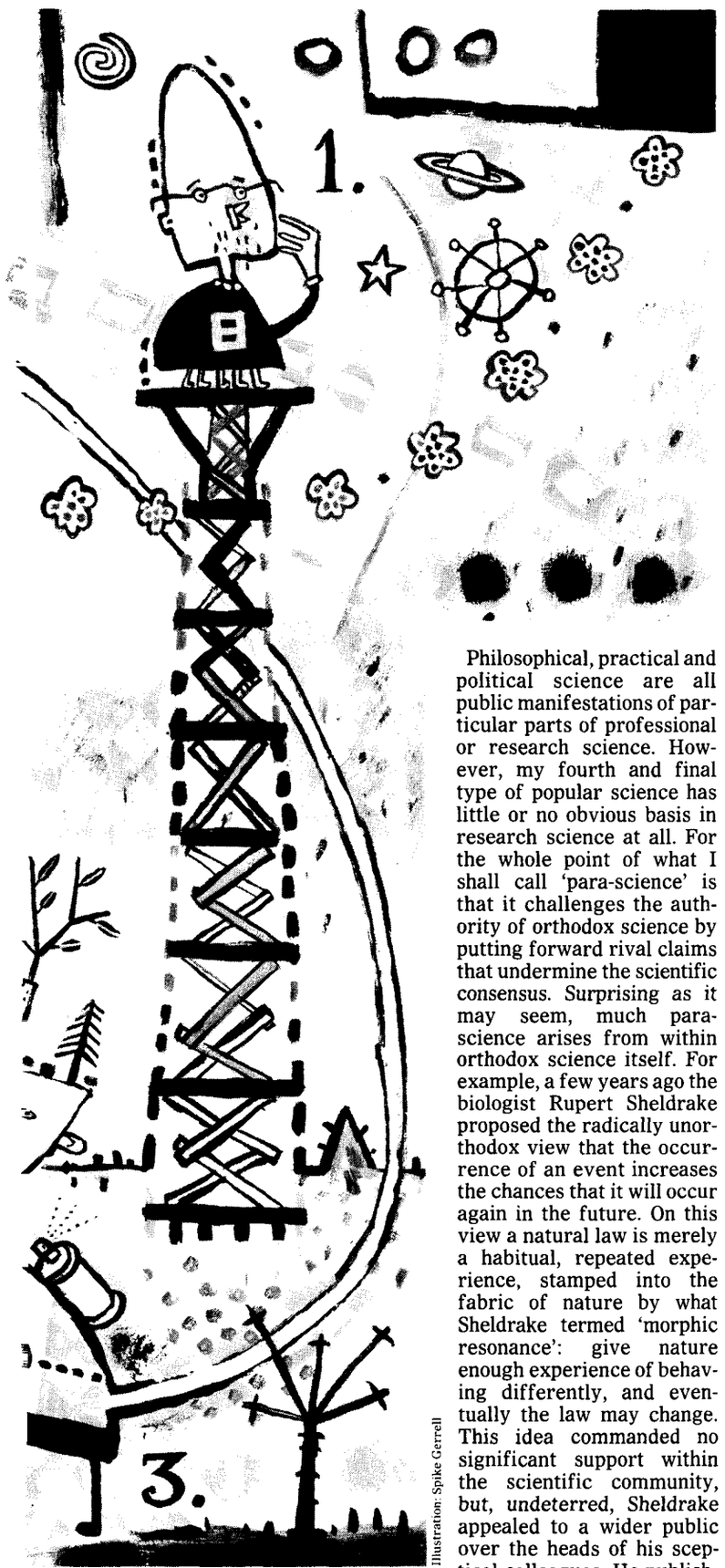

Illustration: Spike Gerrell

Philosophical, practical and political science are all public manifestations of particular parts of professional or research science. However, my fourth and final type of popular science has little or no obvious basis in research science at all. For the whole point of what I shall call 'para-science' is that it challenges the authority of orthodox science by putting forward rival claims that undermine the scientific consensus. Surprising as it may seem, much para-science arises from within orthodox science itself. For example, a few years ago the biologist Rupert Sheldrake proposed the radically unorthodox view that the occurrence of an event increases the chances that it will occur again in the future. On this view a natural law is merely a habitual, repeated experience, stamped into the fabric of nature by what Sheldrake termed 'morphic resonance': give nature enough experience of behaving differently, and eventually the law may change. This idea commanded no significant support within the scientific community, but, undeterred, Sheldrake appealed to a wider public over the heads of his sceptical colleagues. He published his views in a short, semi-popular book entitled *A New Science Of Life*; and followed this up with two more works (*The Presence Of The Past*, and *The Re-Birth Of Nature*). Sheldrake was now a familiar figure on the lecture circuits of Britain and North America; his ideas had wide appeal among groups who felt alienated by what they took to be the materialistic and mechanistic values of western industrial society, and who looked for an alternative world-view in the philosophy of the 'New Age'. Quite rapidly, 'morphic resonance' had changed from unorthodox science into popular para-science. While para-science is strictly a minority taste in Britain today, it is disconcerting to hear reports of its growing popularity in the Soviet Union, where, thanks to the collapse of 'scientific socialism', conventional science may be at risk of suffering by association with discredited political thinking.

I do not claim that all popular science falls into one or other of my four categories, but only that the greater part of it does so. This has several important implications for public understanding of science. For philosophical, practical, political and para-science are not entirely representative of the scientific enterprise as a whole. For one thing, they include many of the more glamorous and exclude many of the more routine parts of science; and for another thing, they include many of the more controversial and exclude many of the more consensual parts of science. To judge from popular science alone, you might be forgiven for supposing that the average scientist is a person engaged in thinking the unthinkable and/or doing the impossible in the teeth of the scepticism or even the outright opposition of his or her colleagues. Of course, some science is like this; but much is not.

Of particular concern is the obvious mismatch between school science and popular science. As I have said, school science concentrates on the well-established and the uncontroversial. Presumably, many people leave school with an image of science as a steadily accumulating stock of unproblematic facts and theories. Yet the science these same people encounter in popular culture is quite different from this. Characteristically, it is controversial and uncertain. The solidity of school science is surely a poor preparation for the fluidity of much philosophical science and political science, not to speak of the evanescence of much para-science.

This mismatch may perhaps help to account for some of the difficulties that we appear to experience when faced with the need to evaluate expert scientific judgments in public. In recent months we have learnt that major miscarriages of justice have occurred because judges and juries have accepted at face value forensic evidence that turned out to be seriously flawed. More generally, we have all been relatively slow to realise that in politically sensitive areas such as civil nuclear power or recombinant DNA technology the relevant scientific and technical questions may be as difficult to decide as the relevant social and political questions.

'The solidity of school science is a poor preparation for the fluidity of much philosophical and political science, not to speak of the evanescence of much para-science.'

Popular science is an amalgam of many different things. To some extent, it represents public interest in the larger achievements of science, both theoretical and practical; but to some extent, also, it represents public concern at the undoubted power of science over all our lives. I believe we should be looking to close the gap between school science and popular science, with a view to equipping future generations to deal more effectively with the science they will certainly encounter in their everyday lives.●

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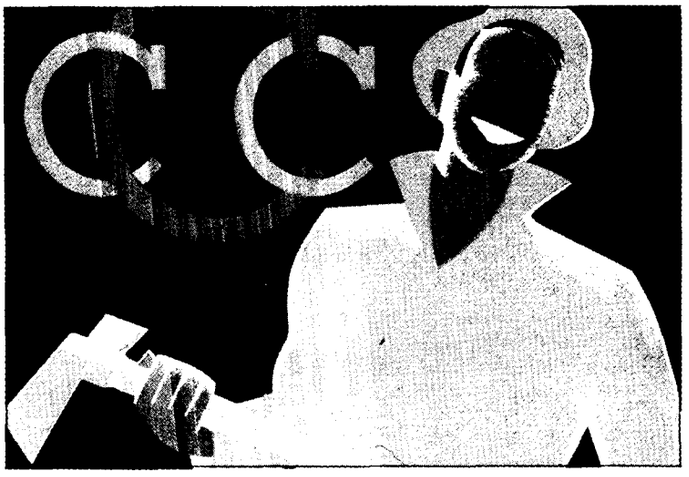
Andrew Gamble on a capitalist crusader

American Pie



Michael Novak's celebration of the American Dream, **The Spirit Of Democratic Capitalism** (*London IEA hbk £9.99*) first appeared in 1982. But as the author explains in his afterword to this new edition it was written during the dark days of the late 1970s when disdain for the American system was common, following its 'shamefaced retreat' from Saigon. 'Soviet armed socialism' appeared to be advancing everywhere, 'anti-capitalist sentiment' among the intellectuals was running high, and liberation theologians were 'glorifying in the triumph of Cuba-style revolution' in Managua. Today the West has won the cold war and regained its confidence. Socialism is everywhere in retreat. Novak does not quite go as far as Fukuyama and announce that history has now ended as Hegel always promised it would, but the message is the same.

Novak is a Catholic theologian, reared in the traditions of Christian socialism who claims once to have been a social democrat. But he became an anti-socialist and has never looked back. The main theme of his book is that what he calls 'democratic capitalism', meaning the kind of economic, political, and cultural institutions which have developed in America, has never been extolled by intellectuals in the way that it deserved. He argues that its ideals are at least as uplifting as those of socialism, while its practice is very much better.

Democratic capitalism deserves our respect not only because it is more successful than socialism but because it is the fulfilment of God's purposes. As Novak puts it: 'The world as Adam faced it after the Garden of Eden left humankind in misery and hunger for millenia. Now that the secrets of sustained material progress have been decoded, the responsibility for reducing misery and hunger is no longer God's but ours.' It is in modern America that the lessons of that decoding have been most successfully applied. The wealth and freedom of the United States is a sign of grace. The Americans really are the chosen people.

But there is no room for complacency. Novak sees democratic capitalism besieged by enemies without and undermined by enemies within. The most interesting part of the book, apart from his discussions of Catholic social thought, is his attempt to develop the insights of Joseph Shumpeter and Daniel Bell that capitalism tends to undermine its own foundations. These foundations are limited government, a network of independent, intermediate associations in civil society, and a cultural ethos which supports private property, enterprise, trust, co-operation, and hard work.

These institutional supports for modern capitalism have been threatened by two interrelated developments. The growth of modern governments in response to the demands of the electorate has legitimated the politicisation of more and more sectors of the economy. The new class of public sector professionals has combined with the traditional intelligentsia to denigrate the values and the institutions, particularly the family, without which a capitalist order cannot be sustained. During the 20th century the spiritual capital of democratic capitalism, accumulated over a very long period, has steadily been used up. The consequences are serious. As Novak puts it in relation to Britain: 'As Britain becomes more socialist, daily life seems to grow less civil and more embittered'.

Novak sees the world in manichean terms. Not just communism, but all forms of socialism, are to be rejected because they contain manifest intellectual errors and threaten the survival of the only social system which is compatible with God's purpose for the human species. Democratic capitalism may not be perfect but there is no acceptable alternative.

The originality of the book is that Novak tries to argue that in its practice if not always in its theory capitalism is profoundly communitarian rather than individualistic. The strength of the family and the rich pluralism of American civil society are not accidental features but the very heart of the American system. Americans, we learn, are not just rugged individualists. They daily practice co-operation and altruism in their family groups, work groups, and voluntary associations.

As a hymn to capitalism the book is quite entertaining. But as a serious intellectual argument it is a failure. It is littered with elementary errors of fact, and lacks rigour. What are we to make of a book which states that Great Britain and the United States were democracies in 1800; or can assert that 'Human offspring require some 20 years of nurture. 3000 years of civilisation must be passed on to children during those years; without that progress would halt.' Numerous authors have their arguments either caricatured or misunderstood. Evidence tends to be used anecdotally rather than systematically.

The book is typical of much writing that has come from the American New Right. It is very strong on the feel-good factor. But if you want a serious intellectual argument you would do better to read Hayek or Peter Berger. Novak has his strengths, and something new to say. His book could be so much better. There is an important theme here. But unless you are already part of the liberty crusade you are unlikely to be convinced by this book.●

Andrew Rawnsley on the Major story

John Who?

First came **The Quiet Rise Of John Major** by Edward Pearce (*Weidenfield & Nicholson, hbk £14.99*), then **John Major: The Making Of The Prime Minister** by Bruce Anderson (*4th Estate, hbk £16.99*), and **John Major** by Nesta Wyn Ellis (*Macdonald, hbk £13.95*). In the war of the Major biographers, Nesta Wyn Ellis has had the best of the publicity battle, sallying forth in a red satin nightdress on television. Anderson and Pearce have resisted the temptation to regale us with their cleavages, attempting instead to peel away the protective clothing of a peculiarly publicity-shy prime minister.

Between the three of them, these rival biographers turn in about 800 pages, each page averaging perhaps 350 words. Are there 280,000 interesting things to say about John Major? Especially when all three only want to say nice things. Nesta succumbs like a Mills & Boon heroine. Granted an interview, she simpers: 'Cognac was poured and the conversation grew informal'. She gushes over this 'man of seemingly irreconcilable conflicts... the courteous gentleman

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street-sharp political fighter... a Jekyll and Hyde duality of calm exterior and passionate tenacious inner drives... fascinatingly unpredictable while impeccably controlled'.

Edward and Bruce are not men given to panting after politicians. Yet they get as star-struck, and their prose as empurpled. 'The private John Major comes across as a natural leader of men', swoons Bruce, begging to have his bodice ripped. 'Without ever seeking to do so, he also has the power to inspire those around him. When in a post-prandial mood, a surprising number of John Major's colleagues can become quite misty-eyed in their enthusiasm for him.'

Edward is also in love. He sighs most poetically: 'Again the words come back: rational, courteous, empathetic, endless patience, good temper. These are not grey qualities, they are adjuncts of excellence.'

Each of these biographers is desperate to rescue their hero from the charge that he is just a touch boring. If the greyness of John Major is only skin-deep, what lies underneath? The shortness of his parliamentary career, the long periods of it spent in non-speaking roles in the Whips' Office or the Treasury, and the tightness of their publishers' deadlines, present all three with difficulties as they grapple with what Bruce calls the 'absence of a persona'.

This is a problem compounded by their subject's determination to avoid filling the vacuum. Major's astonishingly rapid climb up the greasy pole was lubricated by a careful avoidance of ever possessing an inconvenient or unpopular opinion. 'He has a great desire to be liked,' Nesta tells us, writing about the canal holiday in 1987 when Major began thinking about how he might one day lead his party; Bruce remarks that he decided to 'continue to allow the largest possible number of his colleagues to conclude that his views were broadly in agreement with theirs'.

That has left everybody defining Major in negatives. Edward effectively rubs home how much John Major is not Margaret Thatcher. Bruce, writing about the leadership campaign in which he took part, illuminates John Major's great strength in being neither Michael Heseltine nor Douglas Hurd. But who is he?

All three authors identify him with Iain Macleod, as he has identified himself. Edward tells us that, while his contemporaries were listening to the Beach Boys and the Beatles, young Major would buy Central Office recordings of Macleod's speeches.

Yet this doesn't really help us. Like Disraeli and Churchill, Macleod's name can be dropped by any Tory politician trying to invest a speech with some historical authority. Macleod's formula for Conservatism – competent, but caring, while classless – can be found in mouths across the political spectrum from Neil Kinnock to David Owen to Chris Patten. Macleod is claimed as a mentor by Norman Tebbit.

At the end of 280,000 words, I have learnt from Bruce that the Prime Minister is fond of jelly. I have been told by Edward about his passion for clay models. I have been assured by Nesta that he loves his wife and is kind to his staff. Yet I'm left with the strange feeling that I still don't know John Major at all.●

Letting Go

Seamus Heaney is Boylston Professor of Oratory and Rhetoric at Harvard and Professor of Poetry at Oxford. These positions generate the kind of transatlantic life-style more commonly associated with the average business executive. Not surprising then that in his latest collection, **Seeing Things** (*Faber and Faber, pbk £4.99*), 'Things' achieve a 'new momentum': 'One quick/ flick of the wrist' and a fishing line spins off; 'runaway give'. The poet is figuring the act of letting go, and as things are let go they describe a trajectory of escape.

Against this are the lines and markings familiar from Heaney's earlier work, 'pegged out in the garden', as a 'string stretched perfectly to mark the outline of a house'. Here are guides etched arbitrarily onto the poet's world.

This antagonism is in part the poet's response to the death of his father, with whose rural labour he has identified his own craft. The things of this life have previously exercised a discipline over Heaney's language, which has given the poetry its integrity. Still, in this latest collection, we occasionally find him digging – a single metaphor is carefully developed until it fits the insight it was designed to give. These poems do not work. In a world in which our cultural lives are reproduced at the pace of a primetime commercial, meanings are not something we arrive at. Rather they are deferred, rapidly.

Heaney is not unaware of this. The voice exhorting the poet not to waver was once fully assimilated by his own. Now it clearly belongs to another; to his father, fatally distanced. Through parody, the poet distances himself from his earlier work. We are left with a very frank recognition, on the part of a major contemporary poet, of the changed circumstances in which he finds himself practising his craft.●

David Herd

Out Of History

Jeffrey Weeks begins the title essay of his new collection **Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality and Identity** (*Rivers Oram Press pbk 9.95*) with a quotation: 'The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes'. No, he observes, this is not his own voice, but that of Oscar Wilde, writing in the early 1890s. Weeks is the most distinguished British historian of sexuality in the modern period, and *Against Nature* contains a lively selection of his occasional writings from the past decade, which demonstrates how far lesbian and gay theory has developed in its understanding of the workings of power in relation to sexuality.

Weeks steers us deftly towards an understanding of sexuality that refuses earlier 20th century attempts to explain away the great diversity of sexual behaviour, attitudes and identities. His project is perhaps most clearly summed up in the assertion that what is needed 'is not so much a single explanation for the emergence of a homosexual identity as a differential social history of male homosexuality and lesbianism'. This is what *Against Nature* provides, recognising that questions of lesbian and gay identity and politics are never ultimately separable from the wider contingent structures of heterosexuality and of gender relations.

The book begins with a shrewd summary of theoretical debates concerning the social construction of sexual identities. Later essays flesh these out in the context of the 80s, from questions of reproductive sexuality to Section 28 and Aids. There are also excellent essays on the uses and abuses of Michel Foucault, Fabian socialism, and the place of ethics in contemporary society. If you want to catch up with the best in contemporary sexual politics, this is the place to do it.●

Simon Watney

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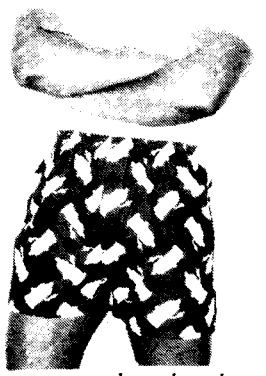

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● **North London:** Following the success of *Body Politic, Erotic Self* we are discussing an exciting range of new projects for 1992. If you would like to help develop a modern political culture get in touch. North London MT Forum, c/o 28 Wargrave Avenue, London N15 5UD.

● **Hackney:** *Global Times* series of seminars on globalisation/localisation starts in late October. For further details contact Sarah Cassidy, 1b Kenmure Road, London E8 1JU.

● **Haringey:** After summer break, discussion meetings resume on 17 September at Hornsey Library, Haringey Park, Crouch End, London N8. Details of the Haringey Marxism Today Group from Mark Perryman on 081-809 5068 (evenings only).

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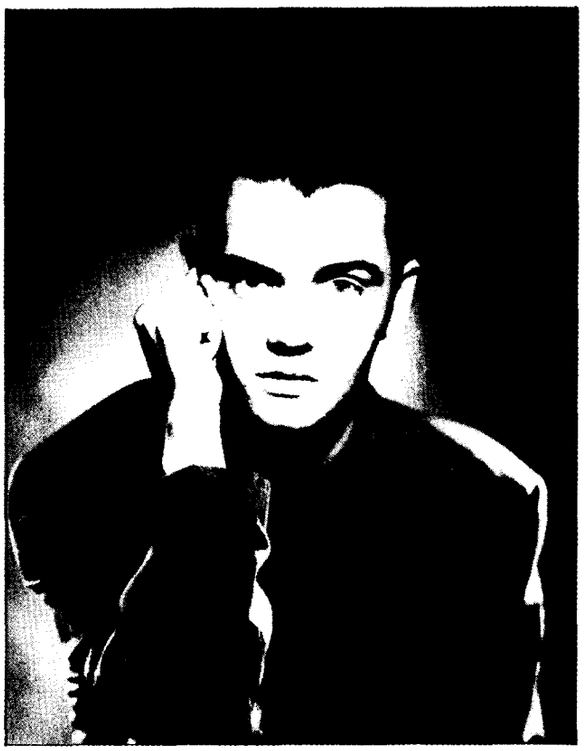
Pat Kane



With his brother Greg, Pat Kane formed the pop group *Hue And Cry* five years ago, for which he co-writes and sings; their new album, *Stars Crash Down*, has just entered the charts at No 10. Besides writing a regular column for *The Scotsman* and being elected rector of Glasgow University, Pat Kane has been asked to stand at several parliamentary by-elections for the Scottish National Party. He is married with one daughter, Grace.

What animal best characterises you, and why? The marmoset – small, blinks a lot, eats forest fruits unassumingly.

What was your first thought this morning? I don't want to go back on tour, I want to cuddle my wife and daughter all morning.

How do you want your daughter to resemble you, and how do you want her to differ from you? I hope Grace has all my intelligence and none of my revenge fantasies.

When did you last visit your parents? They are at the video shoot with me as I write!

Do you believe in a god, or any form of religion? Don Cupitt says that the eternal productivity of language is holy; that's as far as it goes.

You're driving through a hot, desolate expanse. What's playing on the stereo? Tom Waits.

Under what circumstances would you use private medicine? I hope I never have to decide.

Would you like to alter anything about your appearance? No – I'm a radical shortarse.

Which song would you most like to have written? *Shipbuilding* by Elvis Costello.

Do you pay your poll tax? The Scottish National Party campaign says I should, so I'd better.

What is your favourite joke? Do not use language in such a phallocentric way (ie, crap at jokes).

Which thinker has had most effect on your own personal philosophy? Jurgen Habermas: I find his notion of 'communicative action' marvellously humane.

Who would you most like to change places with? George Michael – to see what I'd do with his iconicity.

Did you support the Gulf war? No way, José.

Do you enjoy playing games? Hide and Seek, with Grace.

Do you believe Page 3 should be banned? No – but I'd like to see the unbanning of the male penis on Page 7.

Complete this sentence: If I were dictator for a day... I would institute a hi-tech utopia – then resign.

Which politician do you find least unattractive? Vaclav Havel.

Who does the cleaning where you live? My wife and I.

Do you support devolution for Scotland? As a very poor second best for independence in Europe.

Which newspapers/magazines do you take? Too many, all left-liberal: not enough reactionary reality.

Which is your favourite film, and your most hated one? Favourite: *Wings Of Desire*. Most hated: anything with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Do you have a recurring dream? Everything is saved, everything is peaceful, and then...

Are you superstitious? Nope, ultra-rationalist.

Do you use public transport on a regular basis? Yes, when home.

Where is your favourite holiday destination? Up north of Scotland.

Are your political allegiances the same as they were when you were 18? No – I was mushy Labour, now I'm left Scottish Nationalist.

Do you find it difficult to work professionally with your brother? I did: but music heals better than anything.

What tv do you watch to relax? MTV on tour, *The Late Show* in Britain.

What are your addictions? I'm a chronic bibliophiliac.

Who cooks the meals in your house? We do.

If you couldn't do your current job, what would you do? Minister of Culture for an independent Scotland; it would use up the rest of my brain.

What part of this life would you take into another life? Lust for knowledge.

What is your favourite junk food? Chocolate.

Which film star do you dream about? Madonna and Paul Newman.

Which is your favourite city? Glasgow – an emerging metropolis, New York to Edinburgh's Washington.

Are you a thinker or a doer? Thinker, thinker, thinker.

What do you think is the worst job in the world? Refuse collection.

What do you no longer believe in? Simple economic and political remedies.

How do you want to have changed by the end of the millennium? I want to be a Scottish citizen, a major artist and a father of three.

How much more do you want to achieve? I have exponential ambitions.

Did you enjoy completing this questionnaire? Does the Pope shit in the woods?●

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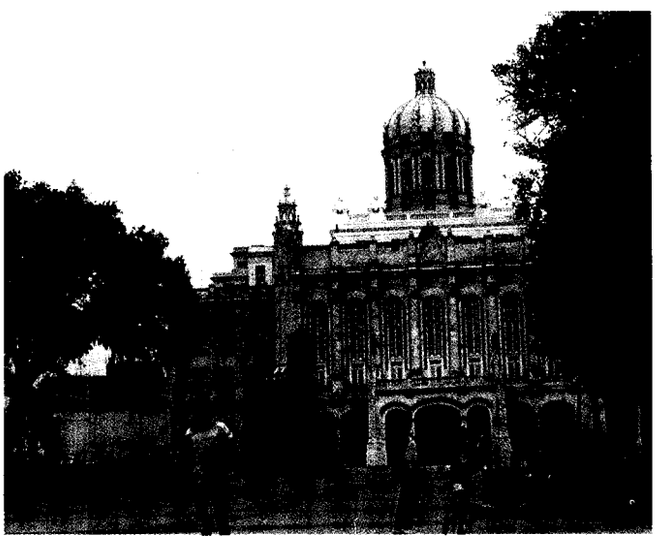

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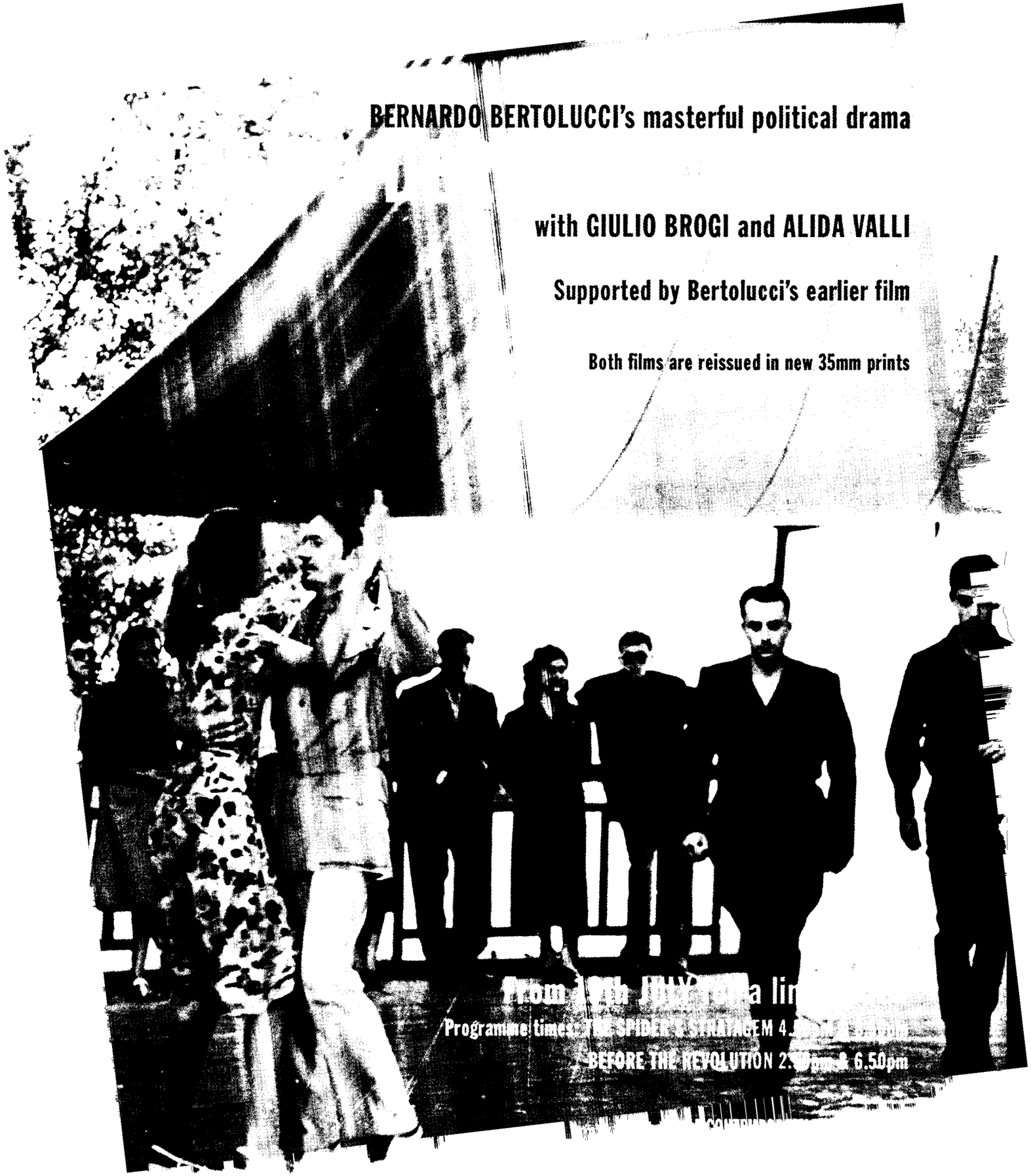

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